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# РАСПРОСТРАНЕНИЕ И ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЕ КИТАЙСКОЙ МЕДИЦИНЫ В МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

Аннотация. В контексте стратегии культурного развития Китая международное распространение культуры традиционной китайской медицины (ТКМ) стало важным инструментом усиления глобального культурного влияния. В данной статье анализируются современное состояние и проблемы межкультурной коммуникации ТКМ, включая неточности в переводе терминов, культурные недопонимания и недостатки коммуникативных стратегий. На основе теории межкультурной коммуникации и анализа литературы предлагаются решения: стандартизацию терминологии через совместный перевод, интеграцию многоязычных языков для перевода терминов и преодоление культурных разрывов в невербальном общении. Особое внимание уделяется стандартизации терминов с учетом философских концепций ТКМ и их адаптации к глобальным медицинским стандартам. Исследование подчеркивает необходимость преодоления культурных барьеров в невербальной коммуникации. Результаты демонстрируют, что гармонизация терминологии и межкультурная адаптация способствуют эффективному диалогу между культурами, укрепляя мировое признание китайской традиционной медицины как носителя древней мудрости.

**Ключевые слова:** культура традиционной китайской медицины, международное распространение, межкультурная коммуникация, создание терминологической базы, культурные различия.

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## RESEARCH ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE CULTURE

Abstract. Under the background of China's cultural development strategy, the international dissemination of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) culture has become a vital pathway to enhance global cultural influence. This study examines the current status and challenges of TCM cultural communication across borders, focusing on issues such as inaccurate terminology translation, cultural misunderstandings, and insufficient intercultural communication strategies. Utilizing cross-cultural communication theory and literature analysis, the research highlights the necessity of constructing a dynamic, multimodal TCM terminology database and improving intercultural competence among practitioners. Key recommendations include standardizing terminology through collaborative translation, integrating multilingual languages for terms translation, and addressing cultural gaps in non-verbal communication. The findings emphasize the importance of aligning TCM's philosophical concepts with global medical frameworks while preserving cultural authenticity. By proposing practical solutions for terminology harmonization and cross-cultural adaptation, this study aims to bridge communication barriers and promote TCM as a medium for intercultural dialogue, ultimately contributing to the global recognition of Chinese traditional wisdom.

**Keywords:** Traditional Chinese Medicine culture, international dissemination, intercultural communication, terminology database construction, cultural differences.

#### Introduction

With the increasing national strength and gradual rise of China's international status, Chinese culture has attracted global attention. The dissemination of China's outstanding culture beyond its borders and to the world has become not only a trend of the times but also an inevitable requirement for building China into a culturally strong nation. The new circumstances, contexts, and requirements have brought historic opportunities for the international communication of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture [1]. As an integral part of China's excellent traditional culture, TCM has gained policy support and guidance from the state for its international promotion. In 2017, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the "Belt and Road Development Plan for Traditional Chinese Medicine (2016-2020)" (Document No. 44 [2016] of the International Department of NATCM), which aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative to outline the direction and provide crucial guidance for TCM's international communication Ошибка! Источник ссылки не найден. Against the backdrop of global pandemic response, TCM therapies have gained widespread international recognition for their efficacy in treating common, frequent, chronic, and major diseases. The subsequent Nobel Prize awarded to Tu Youyou for discovering and refining Artemisinin inspired by the TCM classic "Emergency Prescriptions Kept in One's Sleeve" [2] has further enhanced the global influence of TCM culture.

However, the international dissemination of TCM culture has also revealed some challenges. The communication of TCM culture involves both domestic and international audiences, yet in either context, it inherently relates to cross-cultural communication theories. TCM culture embodies substantial Chinese cultural elements that reflect Chinese philosophical perspectives, where appropriate cross-cultural communication can not only effectively convey TCM knowledge but also demonstrate the wisdom of the Chinese people. Nevertheless, this cultural depth also means that international communication tends to transmit superficial cultural aspects while struggling to convey the theoretical essence. For instance, the international acceptance of TCM primarily focuses on practical medical techniques like acupuncture and related diagnostic methods, whereas the communication of TCM theoretical foundations remains marginalized, resulting in limited Western understanding of TCM's core principles [3].

Given this context and existing challenges, there is an urgent need to address cultural barriers in both verbal and non-verbal communication through cross-cultural communication studies. Establishing a comprehensive TCM terminology database could alleviate translation challenges in cultural transmission, thereby enhancing the accuracy and effectiveness of TCM's international communication. This approach would enable authentic TCM culture to be properly presented to the world through global dissemination.

#### Literature Review

### 1. Research on TCM Terminology Standardization

The construction of terminology databases for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) culture has garnered attention from both domestic and international authorities. China has launched multiple standardization initiatives, such as the Standardized TCM Terminology (2004) reviewed and published by the National Committee for Terminology in Science and Technology. In 2020, the National Administration of TCM released the Clinical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Terminology of TCM. Notably, in March 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially published the WHO

International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Chinese Medicine on its official website.

While diverse perspectives exist regarding translation standards and methodologies, it is undeniable that current TCM terminology systems face significant challenges. A prominent issue is the lack of research on the cross-cultural dissemination of TCM terminology translations. As Kim T enoted, Chinese and Western audiences prioritize different aspects of TCM knowledge [4]. However, due to insufficient studies on the global adaptation of terminology, this critical divergence has long been overlooked. Additionally, standardization lags behind practice, as emerging modern TCM terms often lack timely and authoritative translations.

## 2. Intercultural Communication Theory and Its Application in the TCM Field

With growing awareness of intercultural communication, its significance has been widely recognized. To advance the intercultural dissemination of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) culture, it is critical to examine the theoretical evolution of intercultural communication. Initially, intercultural communication theory posited that language fluency was the important factor for effective cross-cultural engagement [5]. This perspective later evolved to emphasize intercultural sensitivity, framing it as a developmental continuum from ethnocentrism (prioritizing one's own cultural norms) to ethnorelativism (adapting to cultural differences) [6]. Today, the field has entered a phase of integrating Western and non-Western perspectives while deepening the theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence.

In the context of TCM, this theoretical progression highlights practical implications. For instance, early reliance on linguistic accuracy alone often led to fragmented translations of TCM concepts like qi (气) or meridians (经络), which failed to convey their cultural and philosophical depth. By contrast, adopting an ethnorelativist approach enables translators and practitioners to contextualize TCM theories (e.g., yin-yang balance) within global health discourses, fostering mutual understanding. Current integrative models further advocate for co-constructed knowledge systems, where TCM's holistic paradigms complement biomedical frameworks—a strategy evident in WHO's recent efforts to harmonize TCM terminology with international medical standards.

## **Analysis of TCM Terminology Development**

## 1 Characteristics of TCM Terminology

#### 1.1 Philosophical-Medical Hybridity

TCM terminology integrates philosophical concepts with clinical practice, exemplified by terms such as:

- (1) Yin-Yang (阴阳): The dynamic balance between opposing forces in physiology and pathology.
- (2) Five Elements (五行, Wuxing): A cosmological framework (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water) guiding diagnostic logic.
- (3) Phlegm-Stasis Intermingling ( 痰 瘀 互 结 ): A pathological state combining phlegm accumulation and blood stasis.
- (4) Damp-Heat Downward Diffusion (湿热下注): A syndrome characterized by dampness and heat affecting lower body organs.

These terms demand contextualized translations to convey their dual medical and metaphysical dimensions, as literal renditions often obscure their diagnostic specificity.

#### 1.2 Region-Specific Lexicalization

Traditional Chinese medicine culture is based on the origin of herbal medicine. China has vast territory and abundant resources of herbal medicine in various regions, which leads to the development of colorful traditional Chinese medicine culture. Each region has its own characteristics

of traditional Chinese medicine culture, so traditional Chinese medicine terms also have regional differences.

Geographical diversity shapes TCM terminology through:

#### (1) Herbal Nomenclature:

Chuanbei (川贝, Fritillaria cirrhosa): A Sichuan-specific herb for resolving dampness-phlegm, central to the "Sichuan Herbal System."

 $\it Chuanxiong$  (川 芎, Ligusticum chuanxiong): A rhizome used in Sichuan's damp climate regimens.

### (2) Cultural Semantics:

The term stimulating foods (发物, Note  $^1$ ) refers to dietary items believed to trigger inflammatory responses. In Fujian's dialect, however, it is termed toxic substances due to local taboos around shellfish allergens.

#### 1.3 Historical-Cultural Embeddedness

From a broad perspective, the scope of traditional Chinese medicine culture is extensive. It takes TCM classics, renowned TCM practitioners, TCM artifacts, and historical traces as its research subjects and carriers. The content of its studies includes the philosophical foundation and cultural roots of TCM culture, the cultural ideas and exemplary conduct of famous TCM practitioners, TCM ethical concepts, TCM behavioral norms, and the inheritance and innovation of TCM culture [7].

TCM terminology serves as a cultural cipher through:

- (1) Archaeolinguistic Evidence: Oracle bone inscriptions (甲骨文, 1600–1046 BCE) document early disease names like *nüe* (疟, malaria).
- (2) Textual Heritage: Canonical texts such as *Huangdi Neijing* (《黄帝内经》) encode terms like "disordered *qi*" (气乱) within Confucian-Taoist cosmologies.
- (3) Civilizational Continuity: Terms like "harmonizing the middle jiao" (和中焦) reflect millennia-old agrarian metaphors for digestive health.

#### 2. Necessity of Constructing a Standardized TCM Terminology Database

The region-specific variations inherent in TCM terminology necessitate a unified lexical framework to mitigate cross-cultural ambiguities. A standardized terminology database would serve as a linguistic anchor, reducing interpretative discrepancies in TCM exchanges and fostering interregional knowledge synthesis.

Beyond domestic consolidation, global dissemination of TCM culture demands terminological precision as a foundational prerequisite. Current research inadequately addresses the lexical-semantic ambiguity of TCM language, which often leads to misinterpretations or rejection in cross-cultural contexts. Few studies have explored these challenges through the lens of sociocognitive and behavioral theories [8]. A robust terminology database would not only resolve translational inconsistencies (e.g., standardizing *qi deficiency* (气虚) as a functionally defined syndrome) but also position TCM as a transcultural mediator, facilitating reciprocal dialogue between Chinese medical wisdom and global healthcare paradigms.

## 3. Current Status of TCM Terminology Database Development

### 3.1 Institutional Progress

The globalization of TCM has driven advancements in TCM terminology databases. Domestically, China has established national standards and industry norms, such as the Standardized TCM Terminology, alongside digital repositories like the China TCM Database. Internationally,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Note 1: Stimulating foods encompass foods like seafood and spices, which TCM theory associates with exacerbating conditions such as eczema or arthritis.

organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) have spearheaded the International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Chinese Medicine (WHO-IST TCM), while regional initiatives—including the EU's Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive (THMPD) and authoritative acupuncture institutions—reflect collaborative efforts to standardize TCM practices globally.

### 3.2 Persistent Challenges

However, cultural disparities rooted in language, customs, and philosophical frameworks between China and other nations pose significant challenges to the development of TCM terminology databases. Effective cross-cultural adaptation requires not only an understanding of Western contexts but also proactive efforts to align TCM concepts with global cultural paradigms. Additionally, existing databases face critical limitations: multilingual coverage remains incomplete, with underrepresentation of non-Indo-European languages, while outdated terminology and slow updates for emerging concepts (e.g., TCM telemedicine) hinder responsiveness to contemporary needs. These gaps underscore the urgent need for linguistically inclusive, culturally adaptive, and dynamically updated solutions in TCM terminology management.

### Problems existing in cross-cultural communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Based on the research orientation and thematic focus of this study, research team designed and distributed a proprietary questionnaire to a British population sample. The primary information framework of this survey instrument is visually presented in the accompanying figure.

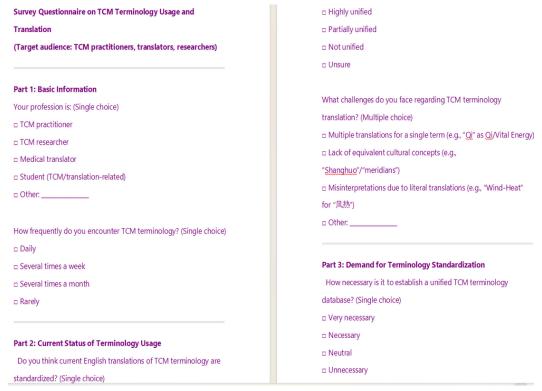


Fig. 1. Part of Questionnaire

Following systematic collection of the survey responses, our team conducted rigorous data analysis and organization, revealing several critical challenges in the international dissemination of TCM culture.

Number of items	Sample size	Cronbach α系数	
17	337	0.717	

Fig. 2. Cronbach's reliability analysis - simplified fomat

KMO value		0.833	
	Approximate chi-square 364.57		
Bartlett sphericity test	df	136.000	
	P-value	0.000	

Fig. 3. KMO and Bartlett's test

#### 1. The translation of the terms is inaccurate

Due to the cultural differences between Eastern and Western traditions, many translations of TCM terminology fail to convey the intended meanings and lack consistency. For instance, the term "上火" has been variously translated as "excessive heat," "inflammation," or "internal fire" across different countries. In Chinese medical theory, "火" (fire) encompasses not just "heart fire" but multiple pathological patterns, whereas "excessive heat" misleadingly associates it solely with cardiac function. The translation as "inflammation" oversimplifies the concept to a localized inflammatory response, losing TCM's holistic perspective. While "internal fire" preserves the metaphorical notion of "fire," it risks being misinterpreted literally as physical combustion. A documented case in the Journal of Integrated Traditional and Western Medicine (2018) highlights this issue: A UK TCM clinic translated "肝火上炎" (liver fire flaming upward) as "liver inflammation," leading patients to self-administer anti-inflammatory drugs—ineffective for this syndrome, which actually requires regulating qi dynamics with formulas like Longdan Xiegan Tang (Gentian Liver-Draining Decoction). Such adverse outcomes stem from inadequate TCM terminology translation, yet this phenomenon is not isolated, which also prompts us to think about how to translate the terms of traditional Chinese medicine.

## 2. Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences

The core values of traditional Chinese medicine culture reflect the ontological view, values, moral outlook and way of thinking of traditional Chinese medicine. This paper summarizes them with the four words "benevolence", "harmony", "precision" and "sincerity" [9]. When traditional Chinese medicine spreads internationally, other countries find it difficult to understand the connotation of traditional Chinese medicine culture and cannot grasp the deepest logic of traditional Chinese medicine culture. This can also lead to misunderstandings. For instance, while TCM emphasizes "medicine as the art of humaneness" (医乃仁术) under the concept of "Ren," Western medicine prioritizes technical standardization and evidence-based practice. The World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki states that medical progress must be based on research, and even wellestablished interventions should undergo continuous evaluation through studies to assess their safety, efficacy, efficiency, accessibility, and quality. Foreign medical communities place greater emphasis on rigorous data, quantifying and evaluating medicine through measurable metrics. In contrast, TCM prioritizes practical medical experience and abstract conceptual interpretations, emphasizing the idea of "words ending but meaning lingering." However, it relatively lacks objective and unified clinical practice guidelines. Consequently, the high-context nature of its language also somewhat restricts its further inheritance, development, and international exchange. It also restricts its further development

and international communication to a certain extent.

### 3. The deficiency of communication strategies

In cross-cultural communication, language is the most fundamental issue. As China is a high-context country, a single word may contain multiple meanings, while most Western countries are low-context countries. This difference can also cause communication barriers. For instance, words like "qi" cannot be translated literally; otherwise, it will lead to communication barriers. The British scholar Geoffrey Leech proposed seven types of lexical semantics in "Semantics", including conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, emotional meaning, etc [10]. The understanding of cultural background should be emphasized in intercultural communication interactions to reduce communication conflicts [11]. On the premise of knowing oneself and the other party, build a bridge for the exchange of individual cultures with common cultures, pay attention to the differences of individual cultures, and reduce the conflicts in the communication of individual cultures.

## Strategies for Improving Cross-cultural Communication Skills in Traditional Chinese Medicine

## 1. Build a dynamic and multimodal terminology database of traditional Chinese medicine culture

From the perspective of the principles of the proposed terminology database, the terminology database of traditional Chinese medicine culture needs to be constructed based on the principles of scientific and systematic character and dynamics. First of all, it is necessary to collect and organize relevant terms. Terms are not just linguistic units, but phenomena with multiple dimensions. These include the function of terms in a professional field, their definition, and how they manifest themselves across disciplines [12]. Therefore, it should incorporate as many terms as possible in a certain field [13]. The establishment of a terminology database requires the collection of as comprehensive and complete terms as possible and their organization based on a certain logic.

Secondly, there is the screening and review of terms. Terms represent professional terms in a certain scientific field. Guan Shijie classified word classes into five types [14]. Among these five types of terms, fully blank terms need to be given special attention. Therefore, when screening terms, fully blank professional terms should be the first choice, followed by semi-blank terms and conflict terms. After the screening of terms, a certain meticulous review system is required. Review the selected terms and establish a complete set of determination criteria. Finally, after collecting and organizing the terms, attention should be paid to the translation and review of the terms.

The above are all the standards guiding the establishment of our terminology database. This paper is establishing a database of traditional Chinese medicine terms collected by ourselves. The terms of traditional Chinese medicine are complex and diverse from the official to the folk, and traditional Chinese medicine in different regions has its own characteristics. This paper hopes to combine official and civilian terminology, which is difficult but this paper thinks efforts are worthwhile.

This paper also pays attention to finding TCM terms from the modern communication environment, and find innovative TCM terms from them. Awakening culture is a sign of the change of communication environment [15], so this paper pays attention to foreign media reports on TCM culture, and this paper also focuses on analyzing these reports.

The terms this paper selected were jointly provided by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine culture in public hospitals and among the public, as well as medical students, with a large sample size. After screening and searching for materials, this research finally translated them together and reviewed them in accordance with relevant domestic and international standards for the

terminology database of traditional Chinese medicine culture, achieving a balance between the scientific character and practicality of the terminology database of traditional Chinese medicine culture.



Fig. 4. Database section truncated

In order to ensure the dynamic update of the terminology base, a long-term maintenance mechanism was established in this study. On the one hand, by regularly monitoring TCM-related discussions in domestic and foreign academic journals, international conference reports and social media, this research can capture emerging terminology or usage changes, such as the international spread of terms such as "Lianhua Qingwen" after the pandemic. On the other hand, open user feedback channels and allow physicians, translators, and researchers to submit revision suggestions, which will be reviewed by a team of experts and included in the database. In addition, it can be combined with translation technology, such as embedding termbases into computer-assisted translation tools or machine translation systems, to force preferential calls to standardized translation methods, and avoid the problem of multiple translations of the same term in different texts.

In addition, input the terminology database of traditional Chinese medicine culture that this research has established into the AI database. When AI translates texts of traditional Chinese medicine, give AI instructions and let AI translate based on the terminology database this research provides. The translations produced in this way will not have the situation where one Chinese term corresponds to a different translation, greatly reducing the process for users to consult materials again to determine the terms.

#### 2. Cultivate cross-cultural verbal and non-verbal communication skills

Before enhancing the cross-cultural communication ability of traditional Chinese medicine, it is necessary to first strengthen the cross-cultural awareness. In the international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture, it is necessary to establish the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences. There are many ways to enhance cross-cultural awareness. From the existing research and teaching practice, two basic paths can be identified. The first path is a more direct and systematic cultural learning that is independent or relatively independent of language learning. This paper temporarily calls it the "explicit" path. The second path is the cultural learning that is integrated into language learning, which is relatively indirect and scattered. For the time being, it is called the "implicit" path [16]. The awareness of respecting others' cultures requires an "implicit" approach, that is, integrating cross-cultural awareness into life, constantly paying attention to cultural differences, proactively understanding the cultural background of the destination country, and

respecting the cultural customs of other countries. Realize the beauty of each in its own way, the beauty of others, and the coexistence of all beauties.

To effectively enhance cross-cultural communication in TCM, it is essential to integrate both explicit and implicit learning approaches, ensuring a balanced combination of structured education and organic cultural immersion. The explicit path involves direct, systematic cultural training, such as TCM exchange programs where international students participate in language immersion and cultural workshops. For instance, universities like Beijing University of Chinese Medicine offer courses where foreign students learn about acupuncture and herbal medicine while Chinese students majoring in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language collaborate with them to practice explaining TCM concepts like "Qi" or "Yin-Yang" in different languages. Similarly, cross-cultural workshops organized by institutions like the Confucius Institute train TCM practitioners in both verbal and nonverbal communication, such as adapting greetings or explaining energy-based concepts like meridians to Western audiences unfamiliar with TCM frameworks.

On the other hand, the implicit path fosters cultural awareness through everyday exposure, leveraging modern platforms like social media to facilitate organic learning. Influencers on TikTok and Instagram, demystify TCM practices like gua sha or cupping therapy through engaging visual content, making them more accessible to global audiences. Meanwhile, Chinese youth increasingly engage with Western wellness trends, such as meditation or herbal supplements, creating a two-way exchange of ideas. Food plays a subtle yet powerful role—sharing TCM dietary practices, such as winter melon soup for detox, while adopting Western health trends like smoothie bowls, fosters mutual appreciation.

By combining structured education with natural cultural exposure, TCM communicators can bridge gaps more effectively, ensuring that cross-cultural exchanges are not only accurate and respectful but also engaging and relatable. This dual approach—grounded in both formal training and real-world interaction—strengthens the global dissemination of TCM while promoting deeper intercultural understanding. If further exploration is needed, examining non-verbal communication nuances, such as gestures and personal space in TCM consultations, could provide additional insights for seamless cross-cultural practice.

After the improvement of cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication is still rather difficult without a language foundation. This requires disseminators of traditional Chinese medicine culture to take the initiative to learn professional terms and cross-cultural communication skills, and acquire the basic ability of external communication. In this way, they can have relatively smooth communication with enthusiasts of traditional Chinese medicine culture in other countries.

#### Conclusion

China and Russia need to overcome cross-cultural communication during the formation of a single socio-cultural space [17].<sup>34</sup> Traditional Chinese medicine culture is an excellent way to understand Chinese culture. Moreover, globalization highlights the urgency of addressing language and cultural barriers in the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine. Inconsistent terminological translations and cultural misunderstandings hinder its acceptance on a global scale. Effective solutions require standardized terminological frameworks, culturally adapted communication strategies, and technological integration.

This paper highlights the crucial importance of intercultural communication in promoting TCM globally. Despite growing international interest, TCM faces persistent challenges in cross-cultural dissemination, including inconsistent terminology translations, cultural misunderstandings, and ineffective communication strategies. These barriers often lead to fragmented interpretations of TCM

concepts, limiting its acceptance in mainstream healthcare systems worldwide.

The development of a dynamic, standardized TCM terminology database emerges as a pivotal solution to these challenges. Unlike previous translation efforts that relied on literal interpretations, this research emphasizes contextually rich translations that preserve both clinical precision and cultural depth. The proposed database incorporates multilingual collaboration, accounts for regional variations, and implements continuous updates through academic monitoring and user feedback, ensuring its relevance across diverse cultural contexts.

This paper contributes to the globalization of traditional Chinese medicine by constructing a terminology database and proposing solutions. In the future, this paper needs to further deepen relevant research, continuously improve the terminology database, optimize communication strategies, enhance talent cultivation, promote exchanges and integration between traditional Chinese and Western medicine, ultimately achieving widespread dissemination and application of traditional Chinese medicine globally, contributing Chinese wisdom and solutions to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Looking ahead, future research will focus on expanding the database's language coverage to include underrepresented regions, deepening interdisciplinary collaboration with medical professionals, and assessing the long-term impact of standardized terminology on TCM's global integration. Additionally, exploring non-verbal communication aspects of TCM practice, such as diagnostic rituals and spatial norms, could further enhance cross-cultural understanding and acceptance.

By implementing these strategies, TCM can transcend language and cultural barriers, and continue to exchange and learn from each other, from the country to the world. This shift requires continuous adaptation to emerging trends while maintaining a commitment to mutual cultural respect. Ultimately, these efforts will enable TCM not only to be a valuable medical resource, but also to be a catalyst for meaningful cross-cultural exchange in our increasingly interconnected world.

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