

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narrative Approaches to TCM in Chinese and English News Coverage Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

This study focuses on the narrative approaches to TCM in Chinese and English news coverage during the post-pandemic era. By employing text mining, case analysis, and comparative research methods, it identifies differences in narrative paths between domestic and international media. Domestic media highlight three core themes: “scientific verification”, “cultural inheritance” and “preventive healthcare”. By doing so, TCM is framed as a national symbol integrating scientific validity and cultural influence. These narratives showcase TCM’s role in pandemic treatment and China’s “Healthy China 2030” strategy. International media present a “mixed perspective”. While acknowledging TCM’s potential efficacy and unique cultural value, they exhibit a tendency toward “Othering” narratives due to limited scientific evidence, safety concerns, and cultural differences. The study argues that in TCM-related reporting, domestic media strengthen TCM’s national identity attribute by linking its historical, scientific, and cultural characteristics. International media, however, focus on controversial topics, emphasizing conflicts between Eastern and Western medical systems. Through comparative research, this paper clarifies the role of media as cultural intermediaries in the globalization of TCM and offers insights for enhancing its international communication.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Narrative Approach, Post-Pandemic Era, Domestic and International Media, Cultural Differences.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a major global public health crisis, but also a critical juncture for the development and internationalization of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In China, TCM has been integrated into the national COVID-19 prevention and control system, and domestic media have reshaped its image by emphasizing scientific evidence and humanistic stories. At the international level, due to differences in scientific cognition and cultural barriers, the efficacy and theoretical system of TCM face doubts. This phenomenon not only reflects the discourse power game between Eastern and Western medical systems, but also highlights the importance of narrative strategies in cross-cultural communication.

The core question focused on in this study is: In the post-pandemic era, how do the differentiated narrative strategies of Chinese and foreign media construct the identity attributes of TCM? Based on existing research, this study advances from two innovative dimensions—multi-dimensional theme integration and cross-cultural diachronic comparison. Through the construction of a systematic framework and dynamic analysis of cross-cultural comparison, it deeply explores the narrative strategies of TCM reports in the post-pandemic era. In the part of domestic research, relying on authoritative media platforms and policy documents, the study covers a number of domestic mainstream media. In the part of international comparative analysis, it focuses on the

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differences in media discourse under the context of multiculturalism, and systematically retrieves a large number of news reports from multiple internationally influential media. Thus, it provides solid theoretical support and empirical basis for the comparative study of cross-cultural communication mechanisms of TCM reports. The research design incorporates multi-dimensional text mining and narrative analysis techniques. While systematically comparing discourse patterns, it also takes into account the cultural context sensitivity of different media ecosystems.

2. Chinese and English Media's Exploration of TCM Narrative Themes

2.1 Narrative Themes of TCM in Domestic Media

2.1.1 Utility Narrative: COVID-19 Serves as a Catalyst for the Legitimacy of TCM

Rooted in the *Huangdi Neijing*, TCM was long labeled as “backward” and “pseudoscientific.” However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it underwent a fundamental shift in public perception. Domestic media, which had questioned its efficacy for decades, began to portray TCM as an evidence-based, essential intervention. This transformation was

built upon two complementary narratives: scientific validation and humanistic storytelling. At the peak of the pandemic in 2020, TCM was integrated into the national official prevention and control system, with the National Health Commission requiring its early and comprehensive involvement in COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment. Media reports highlighted quantitative achievements, such as the distribution of over 280,000 packets of herbal decoctions in Neijiang, Sichuan. Authorities cited clinical trials claiming a 90% effectiveness rate for TCM treatments. Between 2020 and 2023, 3,210 papers on “TCM and COVID-19” were published on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) platform, with the number peaking during the pandemic. Reports also emphasized the flexibility of TCM’s “personalized prescriptions,” its synergistic effects with Western medicine, and its role in reducing severe cases and accelerating recovery. *The People’s Daily* highlighted systematic collaboration, reporting on cases where provincial health commissions coordinated the distribution of “communal herbal soup” and remote TCM consultations. It clearly positioned TCM as a strategic component of the modern public health system, rather than an alternative approach.

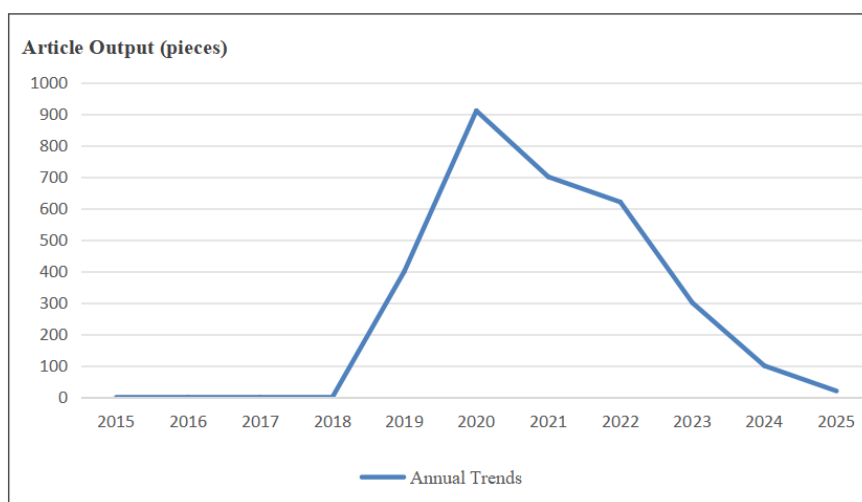


Figure 1. Research Trend Chart on “TCM and COVID-19”¹

Meanwhile, the media have integrated TCM into the national resilience narrative. Through content such as 4,900 TCM practitioners rushing to assist Hubei, hospitals decocting TCM, and communities distributing TCM decoctions, they have not only highlighted its clinical value but also strengthened its attribute as a cultural carrier. *Sichuan Daily* reported on the “communal herbal soup” campaign in 2022. The report not only presented the quantitative results of “distributing 280,000 packs” but also evoked empathy through the plot of TCM staff providing personalized treatment despite shortages, demonstrating its

practical value of “profound cultural heritage”. This strategy of “data-based practicality” and “symbolic resonance” has effectively dispelled doubts. Surveys conducted after 2020 show that public trust in TCM has increased by 63% (National Health Commission, 2023).

2.1.2 Cultural Inheritance: Media as the Guardian of Traditional Chinese Medicine Symbols

Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, domestic media have positioned TCM as a pillar of cultural soft power—a mission further

¹Data source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)

reinforced during the pandemic. Platforms such as *People's Daily* and *Yangcheng Evening News* adopted three core strategies. Firstly, narrative modernization. Pre-pandemic TCM reporting often relied on obscure terminology, creating a disconnect with younger audiences. After 2020, media prioritized accessibility. For example, a 2024 headline titled “*Savoring Health-Preserving Cuisine at the Huxiang Zhongjing Night Market*” combined infographics on Yin-Yang balance with short videos of herb harvesting, using straight forward language. Another 2024 report on “cold constitution” translated TCM’s holistic concepts into easily understandable health advice, bridging ancient theories with modern wellness trends. Secondly, cultural and soft power synergy. Media embedded TCM within the narrative of Chinese civilization, reframing it as a key component of cultural export. Previously niche elements like sachets, medicinal cuisine, and herb cultivation were revitalized as “living heritage.” Official outlets highlighted TCM’s role in global cultural exchanges. *The Journal of International Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (2023) theorized this strategy as the “5W Model,” using TCM’s material culture as content targeted at overseas Chinese communities and global health audiences, disseminated via social media. This approach positioned TCM not just for clinical utility but as a vehicle for Chinese philosophical values. Thirdly, regulatory and ethical support. In post-pandemic discussions on TCM standardization, media emphasized quality control and evidence-based practice. Reports in 2024 on “pharmacovigilance systems” and “Good Agricultural Practices for Chinese Medicinal Materials” highlighted China’s efforts to align TCM with global safety standards. Critiques of “pseudo-TCM practices” reinforced institutional accountability narratives. *China Medical Tribune* (2023) warned against over-commercialization, advocating a “scientific inheritance” framework that balances pharmacologic testing using innovative technology with traditional knowledge from classical texts.

The media have increasingly shifted the focus of TCM from a treatment-oriented approach to the preventive healthcare system, which aligns with the “Healthy China 2030” strategy. Reports on “Regulating Cold Constitution” in 2024 reflect this shift in positioning TCM as a proactive health model integrated into lifestyles. *People's Daily* links the holistic concept of TCM to modern health anxieties, portraying herbal medicine and Chinese massage as accessible and low-cost intervention methods. This narrative echoes

consumers’ growing demand for “natural” therapies. Citing a 2024 market report, the media note that the annual growth rate of TCM health products is expected to reach 15%. The TCM narrative in domestic media intentionally combines practicality and symbolism: it anchors efficacy through scientifically based evidence endorsed by authorities, shapes the humanistic image of TCM practitioners, and embeds TCM into a sense of cultural pride. However, challenges remain, such as balancing tradition and innovation, promoting global regulatory coordination, and avoiding over-medicalization of cultural practices. As TCM transitions from a “pandemic hero” to a pillar of daily healthcare, the dual role of the media, as advocate and supervisor, will determine the extent of its integration into the 21st-century healthcare landscape.

2.2 Narrative Themes of TCM in Foreign Media

2.2.1 Dual Narrative: The “Scientificity” Dilemma of TCM in International Media

Mainstream foreign media usually present a dual narrative of “cautious recognition of traditional values” and “skepticism about modern scientific verification” in their reports on TCM. A keyword analysis from the Factiva database shows that terms such as “scientific verification”, “toxicity risk” and “quality control” appear 82 times per million words, highlighting that controversies over TCM’s scientific credibility and safety remain the core of the international media framework. Critical voices mostly target the theoretical foundations of TCM, such as the doctrines of Yin-Yang, Five Elements and Meridians. Some media argue that these concepts are difficult to explain within the modern scientific framework. In reports on herbal ingredients, the media emphasize the complexity of TCM components, noting that their active substances and mechanisms of action lack in-depth research, and raise doubts about quality control and standardization. For example, Reuters pointed out that “there is a lack of double-blind trial data that meets international standards” (Smith, Watanabe, 2021), while *The New York Times* emphasized that “systematic supervision of heavy metal pollution in herbal cultivation is needed” (Jacobs, 2020).

The efficacy claims of TCM represent another focal point in international media discourse, often framed within the binary of “evidence-based medicine” versus “holistic therapy.” In 2020, the BBC referred to Lianhua Qingwen capsules as a “controversial COVID-19 treatment,” a characterization that encapsulates the ambivalent attitude of Western medical circles toward

TCM's therapeutic claims. During the COVID-19 pandemic, studies published in *Frontiers in Pharmacology* and the *Journal of Medical Research and Pharmaceutical Technology* indicated that TCM, as an adjunct therapy, could alleviate symptoms in mild to moderate cases and improve recovery rates, generating some positive coverage. Yet, skepticism still persisted. As TCM continues to internationalize, some media outlets have begun focusing on emerging scientific evidence. For instance, research in *Frontiers in Oncology* elaborated on how herbal components modulate the immune microenvironment, reflecting a gradual increase in media recognition of TCM's evidence base as clinical research accumulates.

2.2.2 Cultural Barriers: The “Othering” Dilemma of TCM from a Global Perspective

TCM is rooted in China's philosophical traditions. Its holistic perspective contrasts with Western empirical logic, creating a barrier to understanding in international communication. Foreign media often emphasize differences in conceptual frameworks—terms like “qi” and “blood” are difficult to translate, which increases the difficulty of cross-cultural understanding. *The Economist* describes TCM theory as a “failure of cultural translation,” arguing that it is incompatible with biomedical discourse. Moreover, acceptance of TCM varies significantly across regions, and the skepticism and inherent perceptions of most foreigners are hard to change. However, non-pharmacological therapies such as acupuncture have gained more recognition, with media reporting on their effectiveness in managing chronic pain and insomnia. Despite these developments, regulatory barriers and cultural biases still hinder the global integration of TCM. For example, reports that the EU's strict registration process frames TCM as a “soft power tool” reflect the persistent “othering” tendency in Western discourse.

3. Narrative Frameworks and Strategies

3.1 Domestic Frameworks and Strategies

3.1.1 Historical and Cultural Narratives

In the long cultural context, mainstream media have made great efforts to explore the profound historical heritage of TCM. The origin of TCM can be traced back to primitive society, and it has developed a unique theoretical system after thousands of years. These theories not only provide clinical guidance, but also embody the philosophical and cultural spirit of the Chinese nation, and are a concentrated reflection

of the wisdom of ancestors (Du Xueqin, 2020). In the construction of cultural identity, the media adopt a systematic historical narrative strategy. For example, the CCTV documentary *TCM Through a Millennium* restores the scene of “integration of witchcraft and medicine” in the Shang and Zhou dynasties through archaeological evidence and classic interpretation. It traces the preventive concept of TCM back to the thought of “superior doctors treat potential diseases” in *Huangdi Neijing*, realizing the concrete presentation of abstract history. In 2023, the “Qihuang Legacy” column of *People's Daily* launched a 12-episode series “TCM in Classics”. Combining with the annotated version of the Ming Dynasty collected in the National Library, it vividly reproduces the process of Zhang Zhongjing compiling *Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases* during the plague in the Eastern Han Dynasty, providing philological support for the inheritance of classics. Local media create differentiated cultural origin narratives. Henan Satellite TV's *TCM Geography* tracks the evolution of Huaiyao (traditional Chinese medicinal materials produced in Huaiqing Prefecture). Combining soil test data with records in *Huaiqing Fu Zhi* of the Qing Dynasty, it advocates the protection of geographical indications. This verification model of “the combination of historical documents and modern technology” has gained more than 50 million views on Douyin, and the video *Standards for Rehmannia Glutinosa Cultivation* was listed as a teaching case by China Press of TCM. During the application for intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of UNESCO, the media implemented a strategic narrative. When “Tibetan Medicine Bath Therapy” was included in the ICH list in 2023, *China Traditional Chinese Medicine News* launched the “ICH Decoding” series. With the framework of “historical origin, inheritance genealogy and contemporary value”, it interviewed Ciren, the chief expert of Tibet Tibetan Medicine Hospital. Through the details of doctor training such as “three years of studying classics and five years of preparing medicines”, it visualized the inheritance process of living culture.

By focusing on canonical classics such as *The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine* and *Treatise on Cold Pathogenic and Miscellaneous Diseases*, *The People's Daily* emphasizes the historical continuity of TCM. A 2023 report criticized the TCM approval process dominated by Western standards, stressing that clinical efficacy is its vital force: “For thousands of years, every classic formula has been validated through human experience. Evaluations of

safety and effectiveness must be based on clinical practice, not solely on animal testing.” This historical contextualization helps the public understand TCM as the evolving culmination of ancestral wisdom in combating disease (Bai Jianfeng, 2023).

3.1.2 Scientificity and Professionalism

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of the scientific legitimacy of TCM, adopting innovative strategies to bridge ancient wisdom with modern understanding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the clinical application of TCM sparked attention to its mechanism of action: studies have shown that TCM exerts immunomodulatory and antiviral effects. *Guangming Daily* is a typical example of disseminating breakthroughs in TCM research. It has provided detailed coverage of the journey of artemisinin—from its record in ancient medical texts to its recognition with the Nobel Prize. The coverage tracked the experimental process of Tu Youyou’s team, clarified the mechanism of artemisinin in killing plasmodium (by damaging cell membrane structure), emphasized its impact on global malaria control, and demonstrated the modern scientific potential of TCM (Chen Tong, 2023). To strengthen scientific discourse, media has constructed a “clinical evidence chain.” In 2023, *Guangming Daily*’s “TCM Anti-COVID-19 Record” series released data from Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs). The data showed that in 302 cases, Lianhua Qingwen Capsules shortened the symptom relief time by 1.7 days ($P < 0.01$). The relevant infographic was reposted by Xinhua News Agency and received 12 million views. This combination of “traditional formulas” and “evidence-based medicine” has addressed the criticism of “insufficient scientific evidence.”

At the international level, media plays a role in promoting cross-border scientific dialogue. China Global Television Network (CGTN)’s program *The Global Laboratory* livestreamed a collaborative study on artemisinin resistance between Chinese researchers and the University of Oxford’s malaria research team, sharing parasite data in real time. This model of “parallel experiments and mutual validation” challenges the stereotype of TCM being “closed-off.” The YouTube livestream attracted 680,000 overseas viewers, setting an exemplary model for international communication. Media outlets have also clarified the relative positioning of TCM and modern medicine, highlighting their complementary nature. TCM excels in holistic regulation and symptom relief, while Western medicine dominates in diagnosis and critical

care. This balanced framework helps the public develop an objective understanding, avoiding either excessive glorification or outright dismissal. Beyond clinical data, media coverage delves into fundamental research such as pharmacological and toxicological studies, emphasizing the safety and efficacy of TCM. Additionally, layered science communication content has been developed, ranging from accessible explanations of herbal processing to in-depth analyses of theoretical systems and reaching diverse audiences through online lectures, expert Q&As, and interactive platforms.

3.2 Foreign Frameworks and Strategies

3.2.1 Narrative Driven by Characters as the Core

In the theory of news narrative strategies, characters are the core elements that drive plot development and convey information. Research by Zule (2020) shows that *China Daily* has shaped a positive image of acupuncture, portraying it as effective in treatment, widely applied, and safe in operation. In contrast, *The New York Times* has attempted to construct a negative image of acupuncture, describing it as having a limited scope of application, an unclear mechanism of action, and a lack of safety standards.

Case 1: A 2021 report by *The New York Times* stated that Philip William, who had worked in the finance and technology fields for nearly a decade, changed his perception of TCM after his mother alleviated chronic insomnia with anxiety through TCM in 2018. Later, he studied TCM systematically, obtained relevant qualification certificates, and switched to a full-time job at a TCM clinic in New York in 2020. He also leveraged his expertise in data analysis to help the clinic optimize its diagnosis and treatment processes. This report not only uses the individual’s experience as a personal story to enrich the news content, but also uses the “contrast” and “representativeness” of his cross-field career transition to demonstrate the appeal of TCM in the United States and the development potential of the industry. It is a typical method in news narration that presents industry phenomena through individual experiences.

Case 2: In a 2023 report on the risks of acupuncture, *The New York Times* focused on citing the views of Chen Yemeng, Dean of the New York College of Traditional Chinese Medicine. With an educational background in both Eastern and Western medicine, as well as extensive clinical and teaching experience, Chen Yemeng objectively pointed out that most acupuncture risks stem from non-standardized operations rather

than the therapy itself. He also put forward suggestions to reduce risks from the perspectives of practitioners, supervision, and patients. By quoting the opinions of this industry authority, the media provided a scientific basis for the report and effectively enhanced the news credibility. This practice is in line with the strategy of citing professional remarks in news reporting.

Case 3: In 2023, *The New York Times* reported on Jiang Shujuan (transliterated), a catering industry worker in New York. Jiang's lower back injury had not responded well to Western medical treatment, but was cured by acupuncture without side effects, and she later also used regular acupuncture sessions to regulate her sub-health conditions. The report also covered other consumers' varied experiences with donkey-hide gelatin. From an individual perspective, this coverage demonstrates the current market situation of TCM in the United States—its audience is expanding, yet there are differences in public perception. It has aroused public attention to TCM's safety and effectiveness, and embodies the news narrative strategy of “reflecting the group through individuals.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TCM played a role in disease prevention and treatment. However, the controversy over the African donkey skin trade, driven by demand for TCM, became a pivotal point in news narratives. In covering these events, Western media amplified and distorted debates about the efficacy of TCM, leveraging skepticism from some scientists to dismiss its positive contributions in combating the pandemic. In reports on the African donkey skin trade, they placed the entire blame on demand for TCM, while overlooking Africa's own economic development needs, the complex factors of the international market, and China's efforts to curb illegal trade. This approach reflects the bias of Western media and their double standards in covering international affairs, with the aim of undermining China's global influence through negative reporting.

3.2.2 Diverse Scenarios and Contexts

The discourse construction of news texts in Western media is selective and biased. Based on the theoretical framework of “news discourse map,” Wang Jialin, Guo Shuxuan and others studied TCM reports in English media. They found that although the number of reports and their attitudes showed a positive development trend, there were still misunderstandings and smearing phenomena. Due to cultural differences and prejudices, Western media often ignore the diverse perceptions of TCM across different regional cultures

when covering TCM-related content, and judge the cultural value of TCM by Western cultural standards. Peng Huaxin and Song Siru conducted a discourse analysis on the micro-cultural form of TCM concepts in *The New York Times*. They found that TCM has been reconstructed in the process of Sino-US cross-cultural communication: it is defined as a marginal medicine of modern science, an alternative medicine to modern Western medicine, a symbol of “Chinese-style” tradition, and an unscientific ethnic medicine.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TCM contributed to prevention and treatment efforts, while the controversy over the African donkey skin trade, driven by demand for TCM, became a key backdrop in news narratives. Western media amplified debates over the efficacy of TCM, leveraging skepticism from some scientists to dismiss its positive role in pandemic control. For instance, in coverage of the African donkey skin trade, they placed full blame on TCM demand while overlooking Africa's own economic development needs, complex factors in the international market, and China's efforts to combat illegal trade. This approach reflects Western media's bias and double standards in reporting on international affairs, with the aim of undermining China's influence on the global stage through negative coverage.

4. Comparison and Analysis

Current research and comparative analyses on the narrative approaches to TCM in news discourse in the post-pandemic era can be summarized into four main thematic directions. First, multimodal discourse analysis and media imagery studies. For instance, Duan Xinyu (2022) constructed a multimodal corpus of TCM coverage by BBC and CNN, finding that verbal and non-verbal symbols collaboratively reinforced the neutral stance of the reports. Liang Haiying (2023) compared TCM imagery in foreign media before and after the pandemic, noting that post-pandemic coverage shifted toward policy relevance and scientific controversy, though cross-cultural differences intensified the complexity of TCM imagery. Second, framing theory and the evolution of narrative strategies. Zhang Zhan (2023) compared reports in *China Daily* during the SARS and COVID-19 periods, revealing that its discourse strategies expanded from localization to globalization, yet the weakening of patient perspectives may have heightened audience anxiety. Pei Yu et al. (2024) analyzed controversial news frames, pointing out that safety and standardization issues became the narrative focus, though the lack of science

communication content undermined the effectiveness of dissemination. Third, cross-cultural communication and regional media studies. Chen Hui (2024) compared metaphorical expressions in Chinese and American media, emphasizing that systemic differences led to a polarization of TCM imagery. Cheng Die et al. (2024) examined media coverage in New Zealand, finding positive narratives around acupuncture and tai chi coexisting with negative labels attached to Chinese herbal medicine, reflecting the fragmented nature of regional perceptions. Fourth, discourse strategies and ideological critique. Liu Liang (2025) analyzed CNN reports, revealing how the dilution of credible sources and the reinforcement of negative associations undermined the value of TCM. Wang Jieqiong (2024) studied Japan's *Asahi Shimbun*, noting that while it acknowledged the practical utility of TCM, its coverage implied concerns about Sino-Japanese medical competition. At a deeper level, the differences in coverage between the two sides are manifested in various aspects, from narrative stance and argumentative logic to content selection. This reflects fundamental divergences in discourse systems and cognitive frameworks.

4.1 Narrative Standpoint: The Divide Between Cultural Subjectivity and “Othering”

The difference in narrative standpoints between domestic and international media constitutes the core of strategic divergence, rooted in their varying perceptions of the cultural ownership of TCM.

Domestic media prominently adopt a “subjective narrative” driven by cultural awareness, consistently taking the role of inheritors and promoters of TCM culture as their core standpoint, which embodies a strong sense of cultural confidence and identity. This standpoint exhibits dual characteristics in communication. First, positive in value presupposition. Most reports take “the contemporary value of TCM” as a premise. For instance, Yunnan Net puts forward the narrative principle of “upholding cultural essence” and positions TCM as a “cultural card” and “shared asset” through scenarios such as foreign affairs activities and folk exchanges, avoiding fundamental doubts about its theoretical system. Second, constructiveness in communication purposes. Domestic media focus on issues like brand building, standard improvement, and digital transformation. When covering the international expansion of TCM, for example, they emphasize progress in aligning production standards with international ones, rather than getting bogged down in underlying disputes over “whether TCM is

scientific or not”. It reflects an endogenous perspective aimed at promoting the development of the industry.

In contrast, Western media always view TCM from the perspective of “external observers,” and their standpoint shows obvious caution and a sense of distance. Firstly, there is a pretense of neutrality in value selection. While not directly denying the value of TCM, they generally adopt a narrative posture of “awaiting verification.” For example, when Australian media reports on the use of Thunder God Vine to treat arthritis, the modal verb “could” is used to weaken the certainty of its efficacy, forming a sharp contrast with domestic media’s assertions of “definite curative effects.” Furthermore, Western media tend to amplify controversies regarding the “efficacy of TCM” in their reporting, citing some scientists’ views to evaluate TCM against the empirical standards of modern medicine, while overlooking its long-term practical experience and unique therapeutic outcomes. This phenomenon is essentially a manifestation of Western medical discourse power, attempting to maintain the dominance of Western medicine in the global healthcare field under the guise of neutrality. Secondly, there is a critical tendency in topic selection, focusing more on points of conflict with the Western cognitive system. The conflict between wildlife conservation and the development of TCM is a significant theme in news coverage. The demand for animal-derived ingredients in TCM has led to illegal hunting and trade threats to wildlife such as pangolins, rhinoceroses, and donkeys, sparking controversy. International criticism of TCM regarding this issue becomes a focal point in Western media reports. When reporting, Western media unilaterally emphasize the harm of TCM to wildlife, neglecting the efforts of the TCM industry to seek alternative resources and standardize the use of animal ingredients, while avoiding any discussion of the cultural core of TCM. This type of topic selection essentially follows a risk-prioritizing logic under an “external gaze.”

4.2 Expression Logic: The Difference Between Value Identification Priority and Problem Orientation

Differences in narrative logic directly affect communication effects, with domestic and international media adopting distinct approaches of “consensus building” and “question guidance” respectively. Domestic media’s communication logic centers on constructing cultural identity, showing obvious characteristics of positive guidance. They usually first establish TCM’s cultural value and people’s

livelihood value, then use clinical cases and scientific research data for verification. Additionally, they are skilled at using the “shared narrative” technique. For example, interpreting the discovery of artemisinin as a “model of integration between Chinese and Western medicine” rather than a pure TCM achievement, which lowers the threshold for cultural acceptance. Furthermore, domestic media avoid open discussions on controversial topics, and for content such as side effects and efficacy disputes, they mostly adopt an “internal improvement” perspective instead of public questioning.

Western media aim to stimulate public discussion and adopt an expression logic of critical inquiry. Their narratives often start with questions like “Is TCM effective?” and “How to control risks?” For instance, *The New York Times*’ reports on acupuncture initiate discussions from “adverse reaction incidents.” Moreover, relying on dual verification, they enhance objectivity by presenting the opposition between the views of supporters and opponents, creating a tension of opinions. Also, to avoid absolute expressions, they frequently use vague terms such as “may” and “partially effective,” leaving the right of judgment to readers and providing rather limited conclusions.

4.3 Content Framework: The Dichotomy between Systematic Inheritance and Fragmented Verification

In terms of content organization, domestic and international media present a stark contrast between “systematic narrative” and “fragmented verification,” reflecting differences in the depth of understanding of TCM. Domestic media tend to construct a comprehensive value system for TCM, employing a highly systematic content framework that forms a three-dimensional integration of “culture, technology and application.” This approach emphasizes the historical heritage and theoretical integrity of TCM. For instance, reports often reference classical texts such as the *Huangdi Nei Jing*, treating core theories like “treatment based on syndrome differentiation” and “yin-yang balance” as the foundation for explaining efficacy, thereby creating a narrative chain of “traditional wisdom and contemporary practice.” The focus extends to modern transformative achievements, such as advancements in herbal extraction technologies and progress in clinical trials, aligning with the international communication need for a “scientized TCM,” yet always retaining TCM theory as the core rather than wholesale Westernization. Through scenarios like grassroots medical services

and epidemic prevention, the inclusive value of TCM is showcased. For example, reporting on “acupuncture entering communities” addresses both therapeutic effects and cultural identity, forming a multi-dimensional narrative.

In contrast, Western media forgo a holistic interpretation of the TCM system, opting instead for a fragmented verification framework—a linear model of “individual experience - scientific verification - risk warning.” This pattern often begins with a patient’s subjective account of efficacy, shifts to laboratory data analyzing the chemical composition of a single herb, and ultimately culminates in warnings about herbal toxicity or the lack of large-scale clinical trials. This approach not only overlooks the holistic thinking of TCM syndrome differentiation and the practical wisdom accumulated over millennia of clinical practice but also sidesteps the fundamental differences in philosophical foundations and methodologies between Chinese and Western medicine. Incidents such as patient injuries caused by unlicensed acupuncturists in New York or controversies surrounding data from Chinese generic drugs are reported as cases of regulatory failure. When covering such events, Western media often exaggerate the severity of the issues, neglecting the measures and efforts taken by China and other regions like New York to strengthen industry oversight, thereby attempting to discredit the entire TCM industry’s standardization and scientific legitimacy.

5. Conclusion

The narrative differences of TCM between domestic and foreign media in the post-pandemic era are not only a divide in information dissemination, but also a interpretation and collision of traditional wisdom from different cultural perspectives. Through the narrative core of “scientific verification”, “cultural inheritance” and “preventive health care”, Chinese media have elevated TCM from a traditional treasure to a national symbol that demonstrates cultural confidence. In the process of connecting TCM’s historical, scientific and cultural attributes, they continuously strengthen national identity. In contrast, the “othering” narrative of international media, especially Western media, still focuses on controversies such as scientificity and safety. However, this also reflects, from another angle, the inevitable cultural collisions and cognitive differences TCM faces in the process of globalization. Such differences and collisions are exactly the reality TCM must confront when going global. A true nation can withstand hardships, accept praise

calmly, and more importantly, face current difficulties and contradictions directly. As a modern, friendly, peaceful, progressive and safe country, China never fears the scrutiny of different voices. Instead, it has the breadth of mind to resolve cognitive barriers with an open attitude. China neither evades reasonable doubts about TCM from the international community, but responds to concerns with more solid scientific research; nor clings to a single cultural expression, but builds communication bridges with a more inclusive narrative approach.

As an important driver of TCM's globalization, media directly influence TCM's international image through their narrative directions. In the future, only by respecting cultural differences, optimizing communication strategies, and telling TCM stories in a language that the international community can understand and accept, can this ancient wisdom truly cross cultural barriers and become a common asset for global health undertakings. Furthermore, the expansion of media analysis scope and the deepening of cross-cultural communication strategies in subsequent studies will also provide more solid theoretical support for integrating this "Eastern wisdom" into the world, helping TCM shine more enduringly on the global stage.

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