

An Overview and Pathway Exploration of the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Zhaotong Region from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

Changxing Huang¹, Juncheng Liu¹, Xinglian Gao¹, Zeying Zhao¹, Fu Li¹, Bo Yang^{1*}, Heguo Yan^{1,2*}

¹Zhaotong Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Zhaotong 657000, Yunnan, China

²Yunnan University of Chinese Medicine, Kunming 650500, Yunnan, China

*Corresponding authors: Bo Yang, 1274790942@qq.com; Heguo Yan, yanheguo1990@163.com

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Abstract: Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), as a treasure of the Chinese nation, embodies the profound essence of traditional Chinese culture. It serves as a vital component and carrier of this heritage, forming a solid foundation for upholding cultural confidence in TCM. As one of Yunnan's three major cultural cradles, Zhaotong boasts a rich accumulation of TCM culture, constituting an integral part of southern Yunnan's medical tradition. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the development of TCM in the Zhaotong region, interpret its distinctive advantages and existing challenges, and explore potential development pathways. This effort seeks to foster a unique sense of cultural value recognition for TCM in Zhaotong and promote the inheritance and advancement of TCM within the region.

Keywords: Cultural confidence; Zhaotong region; Traditional Chinese medicine; Development overview; Pathways

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1. Introduction

Cultural confidence represents a nation's or a people's unwavering belief in the superiority, vitality, and future prospects of their own culture ^[1], serving as a more fundamental, profound, and enduring force in national and ethnic development ^[2]. Cultural confidence in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) constitutes the essential foundation for preserving the vitality of traditional medicine in the new era and contributing to human health. As a great creation of the Chinese nation, TCM embodies the profound essence of China's outstanding traditional culture and the abundant scientific achievements of ancient China. It profoundly reflects the Chinese people's worldview, values, perspective on life, health philosophy, and methodology. It stands as a treasure of ancient Chinese science and a key to unlocking the treasure trove of Chinese civilization ^[3]. Since the Qin Dynasty opened the "Five-Foot Road" and the Han Dynasty constructed the "Southern Yi Road," breaking through the

barriers between Zhaotong and Sichuan-Shu as well as the Central Plains, the region historically became a hub where merchants gathered. It served as a vital passageway—the “key to southern Yunnan and the gateway to western Sichuan”—and a distribution center for goods from Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces, acting as Yunnan’s crucial gateway to the Central Plains. Here, Central Plains culture, Jingchu culture, Bashu culture, Bo people culture, and ancient Dian culture converged and fused, giving birth to the distinctive, regionally unique, and multifaceted “Zhu Ti Culture”^[4]. As one of the primary birthplaces of Dian culture, Zhaotong holds a pivotal position in Yunnan’s developmental history. The region’s unique plateau monsoon climate, characterized by the coexistence of subtropical and warm temperate zones, has fostered remarkable biodiversity and mineral resources, providing exceptional natural conditions for the development of TCM. Following the Qing Dynasty’s policy of replacing hereditary chieftains with appointed officials, TCM flourished in Zhaotong, establishing a profound historical and cultural foundation. However, no relevant literature has yet documented the development of TCM in this region. Therefore, this paper will examine the evolution of TCM in Zhaotong from the perspective of cultural confidence, aiming to enhance local cultural pride in TCM while offering valuable insights for its future prosperity and development.

2. Advantageous conditions for traditional Chinese medicine development in Zhaotong region

2.1. Abundant medicinal plant resources

Zhaotong lies within a subtropical, temperate plateau monsoon climate zone, characterized by higher elevations in the southwest and lower elevations in the northeast. The city spans a vertical altitude difference of 3,773 meters, exhibiting distinct three-dimensional geographical and climatic features where “one mountain holds four seasons and ten miles differ in weather.” This complex geographical and climatic environment has fostered a rich and diverse array of medicinal plant resources, with over 2,000 species recorded across the city^[5]. According to the Fourth National Survey of Traditional Chinese Medicine Resources, Yiliang County alone hosts 408 medicinal plant species, while Dagan County boasts 615 species. The Qiaojia Yaoshan National Nature Reserve contains over 850 medicinal plant species (including fungi). Among these, Qiaojia’s Da Yaoshan (Great Medicine Mountain) earned its name for its abundant medicinal herbs. The Qianlong-era Dongchuan Prefecture Gazetteer noted: “Travelers can smell medicinal aromas from ten li away.”

Zhaotong Tianma, a prized medicinal herb, is classified as a superior-grade herb in the *Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica*. “Zhaotong Tianma” is widely recognized as an authentic medicinal herb and is a nationally protected geographical indication product. The *Yiliang County Annals* also records: “In the 50th year of the Qianlong reign (1785), the Prefect of Yibin, Sichuan, dispatched envoys to Xiaocaoba to procure Tianma for the emperor’s birthday celebration.” The *Guangxu Annals of Xuzhou Prefecture* records: “Supplying Tianma was a vital duty for Xuzhou Prefecture. Each year, officials were dispatched to procure it from Xiaocaoba in Wumeng (present-day Zhaotong). Caravans transported it into Sichuan, where it was loaded onto official vessels for direct delivery to the capital. The emperor distributed it among his ministers, and civil and military officials considered receiving this gift an honor”^[6]. By the late Qing Dynasty, Zhaotong Tianma and other mountain-grown medicinal herbs were being sold in large quantities throughout the country. Beyond *Gastrodia*, Zhaotong also abundantly produced major medicinal herbs including *Paris polyphylla*, *Pinellia ternata*, *Polygonatum sibiricum*, *Platycodon grandiflorus*, *Magnolia officinalis*, *Phellodendron amurense*, and *Eucommia ulmoides*. Notably, Zhaotong’s *Pinellia ternata* far surpassed other regions in quality, earning the reputation of “Pearl Pinellia”^[5]. This rich herbal resource laid a solid foundation for the development of local traditional Chinese

medicine.

2.2. Deep historical and cultural roots

As one of Yunnan's three major cultural cradles, Zhaotong boasts a long history and profound cultural heritage. The discovery of early *Homo sapiens* fossils ("Zhaotong Man," dating back 100,000 years) filled a historical gap in Yunnan's evolution from archaic humans to late *Homo sapiens*. From the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period, the Du Yu tribe migrated from Zhaotong to Shu, teaching agriculture and bringing advanced farming civilization to the region. In 250 BCE, King Xiaowen of Qin commissioned Li Bing, the governor of Shu Commandery, to construct the Fendao Road. After Emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China in 221 BCE, he dispatched Chang Han to extend Li Bing's Fendao Road to Jianning (present-day Qujing), historically known as the "Five-Foot Road." In 135 BC, to expand economic and cultural exchanges between the Central Plains and Southwest China, the Western Han Dynasty reopened the "Southern Yi Road" and established Zhuti County (Commandery) in present-day Zhaotong City, marking Zhaotong's first incorporation into the central government's administration. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, Zhaotong was administered as Wumeng Road and Wumeng Prefecture. Following the "Reform of the Hereditary Chieftainships" in the ninth year of the Yongzheng reign (1731), Wumeng was renamed Zhaotong. From the "Five-Foot Road" to the "Southern Yi Road," from Zhuti to Wumeng and finally to Zhaotong—through this long historical evolution, the Zhaotong region sustained profound influences from Central Plains culture while preserving the distinctive characteristics of Southwest China's ethnic minorities. This synthesis fostered a unique and rich historical and cultural heritage in TCM, providing exceptionally fertile ground for the development of TCM in the area.

2.3. Diverse ethnic integration environment

Zhaotong, located in northeastern Yunnan Province, is a region of multi-ethnic cohabitation. It is home to 45 ethnic groups, including the Han, Yi, Hui, and Miao, with a current population of 6.33 million. The Yi, Hui, and Miao ethnic groups constitute the three major minority populations. The Miao population numbers approximately 220,000 ^[7], accounting for 14.3% of Yunnan's total Miao population and 32.1% of the city's total minority population. Ethnic medicine and culture represent a unique knowledge system for preventing and treating diseases, developed by various ethnic minorities within their respective social and living environments based on long-term practical experience. It is also an important component of China's traditional culture. In terms of ethnic medicine, Zhaotong possesses exceptionally rich resources. Ethnic groups such as the Yi, Miao, and Hui each have their own medical traditions. For instance, Ma Mingtai, a Miao physician from Dagan, authored the book *Miao Medical Legacy*, which documents that Miao medicine prioritizes "Yuntian" diagnosis as its primary diagnostic method, with the other "Four Diagnoses" serving as secondary approaches. The integration of traditional Chinese medicine culture from the Central Plains with the ethnic medicine of the Yi, Miao, and other ethnic groups in the southwestern regions has fostered the development of a distinct regional system of traditional Chinese medicine culture, forming a vital component of the southern Yunnan medical school.

3. Development of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong region

Based on the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong, its cultural evolution can be broadly divided into three phases: pre-Qing Dynasty, Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period, and the post-founding of New China era.

3.1. Development of traditional Chinese medicine before the Qing Dynasty

Although the Zhaotong region possesses abundant TCM resources, due to its historical status as an area predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities, local populations often relied on shamanism and superstition rather than medicine. Folk practitioners using herbal remedies were prevalent locally, resulting in scant historical records concerning traditional Chinese medicine. The earliest documented references to TCM in the Zhaotong region date back to the Jin Dynasty. Guo Yigong's *Guangzhi* records: "Zhu Shi's Hanyang County produces Fuling, formed from pine sap, superior to Poria cocos; some call it pine root Poria." The *Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica*, compiled during the Eastern Han Dynasty, states: "Red arrow root, pungent and warm in nature. It kills ghostly spirits, insect toxins, and foul qi. Long-term use enhances vitality, strengthens the kidneys, promotes robust health, lightens the body, and extends longevity. Also known as Limo or Guiduyou^[8]. It grows in mountain valleys." By the Song Dynasty, comprehensive understanding and broader applications of Zhaotong Tianma emerged. For instance, the *Kaibao Materia Medica* summarized its properties as: "It treats all types of wind-damp paralysis, limb stiffness, childhood convulsions, fright-induced disorders, strengthens the waist and knees, and fortifies tendons and muscles"^[9]. However, prior to the Qing Dynasty, discussions and research on Zhaotong traditional Chinese medicine were limited to herbal materials, lacking relevant records or treatises on traditional Chinese medical practices.

3.2. Development of traditional Chinese medicine from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period

It was not until the Qing Dynasty that local Zhaotong documents formally recorded the region's traditional Chinese medicine. This period saw the emergence of numerous prominent traditional Chinese medicine practitioners in Zhaotong, distinguished by significant social influence, exceptional medical skill, high medical ethics, profound scholarly works, and considerable renown. For instance, the Biographical Section of the *Annals of En'an County*, compiled by Dai Fang and Ma Zhou, records: "Li Xun, originally from Shaanxi, settled in Zhaozhou. Born on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in the thirteenth year of the Kangxi reign, he lived to be one hundred and four years old. He excelled in the art of medicine. When people fell ill, he would knock on doors even in the dead of night, crawling on his hands and knees to save them." Particularly after the reform of the hereditary chieftain system in the eighth year of the Yongzheng reign, traditional Chinese medicine in the Zhaotong region flourished significantly. According to the *Zhaotong Health Chronicle*: In the ninth year of the Yongzheng reign, the Qing court dispatched Zhang Shangzhe to establish a city in Zhaotong. His son, Zhang Yunsheng, accompanied his father to Zhaotong and practiced medicine. During the Tongzhi era, the juren Zhang Fuchu, renowned for his medical expertise, authored the Simplified Collection of Pulse Classics. His son, Zhang Lunyi, inherited his father's practice and mastered pulse diagnosis. In the early Republic era, he was hired as the school physician at Yunnan Provincial No. 2 Middle School (now Zhaoyang No. 1 Middle School), becoming the first school physician in Zhaotong's public education system. Scholar Wang Zhilun, well-versed in classical medical texts, was both highly talented and skilled in medicine. Adhering to the Warm Disease School, he achieved remarkable therapeutic results, drawing crowds to his practice. Wu Liangtong of Dagan excelled in medical studies and authored *Essentials of Materia Medica*. In the late Qing dynasty, Zheng Haibo studied martial arts and medicine at Shaolin Temple in Henan. Upon returning to Zhaotong, he established the city's first "Zheng Haibo Medical Clinic," specializing in treating trauma injuries. His self-formulated "Yili Golden Pill" proved highly effective for both internal and external injuries. His eldest son, Zheng Beren, later inherited the practice, becoming a renowned orthopedic surgeon in Zhaotong at the time. Li Rangqing excelled

in internal medicine, mastering both ancient and modern proven formulas to cure various complex and severe illnesses. Contemporaries honored him with plaques inscribed “Highly Ethical and Skilled Physician” and “A Second Coming of Hua Tuo.” According to the Republican-era “Comprehensive Survey of Medicine and Pharmacy in Yunnan Province,” Zhaotong had 67 traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. Among them, 26 were in Zhaotong County, 3 in Yanjin County, 6 in Dagan County, 8 in Qiaojia County, 8 in Suijiang County, 8 in Ludian County, and 8 in Yiliang County (Yongshan, Zhenwei, and Weixin counties were not included in the statistics). Simultaneously, traditional Chinese medicine clinics and pharmacies, established by individual practitioners or through collective funding, sprang up like mushrooms after rain. These establishments either provided medical treatment or sold herbal medicines, serving the public’s healthcare needs. Among these, the “Changchun Hall” established by Chen Dewu in the late Qing Dynasty primarily focused on medical practice while also selling medicines, making it the earliest TCM pharmacy in Zhaotong City. The “Peichun Hall,” opened by father and son Zhang Peichun and Zhang Shaorong, mainly sold medicines and was the largest TCM pharmacy in Zhaotong City during the late Qing period. According to incomplete statistics, there were 32 such pharmacies in Zhaotong, 4 in Ludian, 8 in Qiaojia, Yanjin had 15, Dagan had 9, Yongshan had 1, Suijiang had 21, Zhenxiong had 12, Yiliang had 6, and Weixin had 4. Additionally, over 20 mobile TCM stalls operated throughout urban and rural areas, traveling from village to village to treat the common people.

In the early years of the Republic of China, to unite traditional Chinese medicine practitioners across the county for mutual exchange of experience, research, and discussion to enhance the academic level of traditional Chinese medicine, and to achieve the goal of relieving the suffering of the people from disease, the “Zhaotong County Medical and Pharmaceutical Trade Association” was established. This was the earliest mass organization of practitioners in the traditional Chinese medicine field in the Zhaotong region.

During this period, the Zhaotong region produced a wealth of works on traditional Chinese medicine, solidifying the theoretical foundation of traditional Chinese medicine in the region and initially establishing the Zhaotong traditional Chinese medicine cultural system. Works such as Lü Guang’ao’s *Common Medicinal Herbs of Dagan*, Wu Liangtong’s *Essentials of Materia Medica*, Zhang Fuchu’s *Simplified Collection of Pulse Classics*, Liu Mingxuan’s *Miscellaneous Discussions on Medical Principles*, and Xie Chaozhi’s *Measles Prevention and Treatment Correspondence, Study Guide on Shanghan Lun, Annotations, Selected Cold Materia Medica*, and *Cold Decoction Formulas in Verse* were widely circulated.

3.3. Development of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong region after the founding of New China

Following the establishment of New China, the state introduced a series of policies and guidelines for traditional Chinese medicine, ensuring its inheritance and advancement. The Zhaotong region closely followed the Party and government’s TCM development initiatives, establishing educational institutions through multiple channels and formats to cultivate numerous TCM professionals. It established TCM institutions such as TCM hospitals, pharmaceutical inspection institutes, and pharmaceutical factories, actively advancing all aspects of TCM work. This fostered the emergence of many outstanding TCM healthcare professionals and achieved remarkable results in TCM scientific research, ensuring the advancement of TCM treatment, teaching, and research. The TCM sector thus presented a promising landscape of vigorous development. Statistics indicate that in 1951, Zhaotong District had over 600 TCM practitioners. That same year, Qiaojia County established one county-level TCM joint clinic and four district-level TCM joint clinics. By 1953, TCM joint clinics were established in Tianxing, Jili, and Mugan townships of Dagan County. By 1956, the district had organized a total of 111 joint

medical institutions.

Following the public-private partnership of the Yong'an Pharmacy in 1958, a pharmaceutical workshop was established. It produced honey pills and water-coated pills such as Tianma Pills and Infant Convulsion Pills; powdered medicines including Yinqiao Detoxifying Powder and Liu Yi Powder; and tinctures like Trauma and Consumption Wine, Tiger Bone and Papaya Wine, Leopard Bone and Papaya Wine, and Tiger Bone Wine, which were sold both within and outside the region. In 1959, actively responding to the *People's Daily* editorial call to "collect folk remedies and unearth the treasures of traditional Chinese medicine," a nationwide "Folk Remedy Collection" campaign was launched. Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners were mobilized to contribute prescriptions and medicines, while folk single-ingredient formulas, verified recipes, and secret remedies were collected and compiled into the publication *Folk Remedy Collection*, distributed nationwide for exchange. From June 1966 to 1974, the region's healthcare system was engulfed in the Cultural Revolution. The slogan "Smash the United Hospitals" targeted traditional Chinese medicine institutions, with many veteran practitioners labeled as "demons and monsters." This period significantly hindered the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong Prefecture. In 1970, the Zhaotong Prefecture Pharmaceutical Factory (originally named the 626 Pharmaceutical Factory) was established. Subsequently, pharmaceutical factories were founded by the medical companies of Yanjin County, Yiliang County, and Zhenxiong County. The Zhaotong Prefecture Pharmaceutical Factory primarily produced Tianma Pills, Bai Zi Yang Xin Pills, and Hawthorn Pills. After 1985, it also produced Tianma crystals and Tianma oral liquid formulations. The "Zhaoyao" brand Tianma pills were consecutively recognized as provincial-level high-quality products from 1979 to 1981, and in 1983, they were further designated as high-quality products by the State Pharmaceutical Administration.

Following the opening-up and reform in 1978, with the care and support of the state and various departments, the traditional Chinese medicine sector in Zhaotong Prefecture experienced vigorous development. In 1980, the Yanjin County Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine was established, marking the first independent TCM institution founded by the People's Government. The Zhaotong Prefecture Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine followed in 1981. By 1986, county-level TCM hospitals had been established in Qiaojia, Dagan, Weixin, Zhenxiong, and Weixin counties. By 1988, all counties in the prefecture except Shuifu had established TCM hospitals, totaling 11 institutions. According to 1990 statistics, the region had 838 TCM professionals: 9 deputy chief TCM physicians, 2 deputy chief TCM pharmacists, 80 attending TCM physicians, 6 chief TCM pharmacists, 402 TCM physicians, 87 TCM pharmacists, 66 TCM technicians, 40 TCM pharmacy technicians, 21 pharmacy assistants, and 125 other TCM practitioners. In 1995, the Zhaotong Prefecture Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital was awarded the title of "Grade III Class B Hospital." In 2012, the Zhaotong Municipal Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital passed the evaluation to become a Grade III Class A Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital. In December 2024, the Shuifu City Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital, the last county-level city TCM hospital constructed in the Zhaotong region, successfully opened. As of this date, the Zhaotong region possesses 1 municipal-level hospital and 11 county-level TCM hospitals, marking significant progress in the development of traditional Chinese medicine within the region.

4. Challenges in the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong

Throughout its long historical development, the advancement of traditional Chinese medicine in Zhaotong has encountered numerous challenges, specifically manifested in the following four aspects. While remarkable achievements have been made, addressing these developmental issues is essential for ensuring sustainable

progress.

4.1. Lack of documented records and insufficient research

As one of Yunnan's earliest and most profoundly influenced regions by Central Plains culture, Zhaotong possesses deep cultural roots and stands as a primary cradle of Dian culture, holding significant historical importance in Yunnan's development. Zhaotong's red-painted silver enjoyed renown from the Han Dynasty through the Qing Dynasty, reaching peak production nationwide by the seventh year of the Jiaqing reign (1802), with over 100,000 miners employed. Such a large workforce would have required commensurate medical infrastructure in the surrounding areas. However, extensive historical literature reveals no corresponding records. This absence stems from two primary factors: first, constrained by the socio-economic development of Zhaotong at the time and the influence of ethnic minority cultures, most practitioners did not compile medical texts; second, prolonged warfare and policy disruptions in the region led to the failure to preserve many medical classics in a timely manner. For instance, Daguang Zeng Yusān authored works like *Essentials of the Four Diagnostic Methods* and *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine*, totaling over 600,000 characters, all destroyed during the Cultural Revolution—a significant loss to Zhaotong's TCM heritage. Third, insufficient emphasis has been placed on cataloging TCM's historical and cultural legacy or excavating indigenous folk medicine. To date, no research reports documenting the excavation and compilation of TCM literature in Zhaotong exist.

4.2. Insufficient inheritance and development, with no mature schools formed

Influenced by regional culture and traditional concepts, the Zhaotong region has seen inadequate inheritance and development of TCM, resulting in the absence of mature schools. This manifests in three ways: First, conservative transmission methods. Most rely on family traditions or master-apprentice relationships. Even within these relationships, many practitioners harbor concerns that “teaching apprentices will starve the master,” leading to widespread practices of withholding knowledge. This prevents valuable TCM knowledge and techniques from widespread dissemination and application, keeping them in a state of secrecy. Second, with socioeconomic development and shifting values, many young people seek opportunities in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen or pursue better careers, showing little interest in inheriting their elders' legacy. Third, there is a lack of systematic and standardized management. Much TCM knowledge and techniques exist as secret transmissions, lacking standardized inheritance systems and teaching methods. This creates gaps in TCM transmission, hindering its long-term development. Fourth, government guidance is insufficient, and regional awareness of TCM brands is lacking. The technical expertise and distinctive strengths of renowned senior TCM practitioners have not been fully leveraged, and traditional TCM transmission methods like master-apprentice systems lack sufficient promotion. These factors have hindered the effective exploration, inheritance, and development of TCM in Zhaotong. Consequently, no regionally distinctive TCM academic schools have emerged, and no representative local TCM masters or teams have systematically organized the region's disease characteristics, academic concepts, theories, and clinical experience. This prevents the creation of landmark TCM products capable of regional influence.

4.3. Insufficient scientific research and innovation, monolithic TCM industry development

Currently, TCM in Zhaotong remains confined to the primary stage of disease treatment and patient care.

Scientific research began late, and the transformation of research outcomes lags behind. The region's abundant TCM resources have not provided strong impetus for the development of TCM in Zhaotong City. According to incomplete statistics, Zhaotong hosts 198 families and 2,023 species of medicinal plants, including 19 rare and valuable herbs, 66 bulk medicinal materials, and 14 introduced species. However, only one Gastrodia Research Institute exists, focusing on cultivation and component studies of *Gastrodia elata* without collaborating with TCM medical institutions. Only Yunnan Yongzhitang Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., Yunnan Bangming Gastrodia Elata Biotechnology Co., Ltd., and Zhaotong Huacheng Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. have developed key products such as "Gastrodia Elata Brain-Awaken Capsules," "Eight-Ingredient Cinnamon Capsules," "Cholagogue and Analgesic Capsules," and "White Loquat Phlegm-Relieving and Asthma Capsules" ^[10]. The TCM research and development market remains largely untapped, with technological innovation capabilities significantly failing to meet public health needs and TCM market demands. Concurrently, medical institutions have focused solely on increasing revenue from medical services, failing to fully recognize the potential in TCM research and development, deep processing, wellness and rehabilitation, and TCM cultural tourism.

5. Countermeasures and recommendations

Embracing cultural confidence in the new era is both our responsibility and mission. As inheritors of traditional Chinese medicine culture, seizing opportunities to promote this heritage through inheritance is also an honorable mission bestowed upon us by our times ^[11]. The General Secretary emphasized: "We must protect, preserve, and develop the treasure trove of traditional Chinese medicine left by our ancestors. We should apply ancient wisdom to modern needs and strive for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese medicine health culture" ^[12].

5.1. Strengthening policy support and financial investment to enhance TCM service standards

In recent years, national and local governments have introduced a series of policy measures to continuously increase support for the development of TCM. The Zhaotong region should seize this opportunity to further bolster its support for the advancement of TCM. First, formulate specific and feasible policy measures to ensure the consolidation and elevation of TCM's status in healthcare, education, scientific research, and other areas. Second, increase funding for TCM development to support research projects, talent cultivation, and service system construction, providing stable financial backing for TCM inheritance and advancement. Third, strengthen the TCM service network to enhance grassroots service capabilities, ensuring convenient access to TCM services for the public. Fourth, promote the integration of TCM with Western medicine, prevention, health preservation, and rehabilitation to establish diversified service models. This will elevate TCM service standards in Zhaotong and meet the diverse health needs of its residents.

5.2. Strengthening the academic inheritance of renowned senior TCM practitioners and advancing the development of local TCM academic schools

The academic inheritance of distinguished senior practitioners encompasses not only unique diagnostic and therapeutic techniques and rich clinical experience but also profound TCM theoretical knowledge and cultural essence. These invaluable assets play an irreplaceable role in promoting the development of local TCM academic schools. First, establish master-apprentice studios, TCM mentor-apprentice programs, and clinical teaching systems to pass down the unique diagnostic techniques and clinical experience of renowned senior

practitioners. Second, encourage successors to engage in TCM academic research, conducting in-depth studies grounded in the academic thought of senior practitioners to drive innovation and development in TCM theory. Third, organize successors to participate in various TCM academic conferences and exchange activities to broaden their horizons and foster collaboration with other scholars.

5.3. Strengthening the exploration and research of TCM resources to enhance the academic influence of TCM in the Zhaotong region

Since the Qing Dynasty, medical practitioners in Zhaotong have compiled medical works such as *Essentials of Materia Medica* and *Simplified Collection of Pulse Classics*, while also leaving behind extensive clinical diagnostic and therapeutic experience. First, under government leadership, encourage TCM practitioners and scientific researchers to intensify efforts in excavating and organizing regional medical figures, academic schools, medical classics, formulas, and distinctive diagnostic techniques. Summarize the clinical experience and academic thought of renowned senior TCM practitioners in Zhaotong, conduct in-depth research on the historical origins, academic characteristics, and clinical advantages of local TCM schools, and uncover their unique value. Second, incorporate the preservation of ethnic and folk medicine cultures into government cultural development plans. This includes collecting, annotating, and publishing medical texts from ethnic and folk medicine traditions to safeguard existing resources. Provide protection and support to ethnic and folk medicine practitioners with proven efficacy and established reputations, offering platforms for qualified doctors to learn from them. Through apprenticeship-based training, cultivate a cohort of inheritors of ethnic and folk medicine to advance the comprehensive development of both TCM and ethnic medicine.

5.4. Strengthening the promotion and popularization of TCM to solidify local confidence in traditional Chinese medicine culture

Against the backdrop of national initiatives to integrate TCM culture into schools, incorporate TCM education throughout the school curriculum. Enable students to understand the historical origins, fundamental theories, and diagnostic and therapeutic methods of TCM during their studies, cultivating their cultural literacy in TCM and fostering ethnic pride, thereby enhancing confidence in traditional Chinese medicine culture. Simultaneously, enhance academic exchanges and external publicity to apply the diagnostic techniques and clinical experience of TCM academic schools in the Zhaotong region to broader fields. This will elevate the social recognition and influence of these academic schools, establish a distinctive Zhaotong TCM brand, and solidify confidence in the region's TCM culture.

5.5. Strengthening TCM research and innovation to drive industrial development and propel technological innovation in TCM within the Zhaotong region

Encourage more TCM professionals to engage in research: First, compile and systematize clinically effective and distinctive diagnostic techniques and treatment experiences for common, prevalent, and complex diseases in Zhaotong, innovate TCM diagnostic and therapeutic methods, and develop regional treatment protocols for priority conditions. Second, leverage Zhaotong's abundant medicinal plant and animal resources to deepen the development and application of the herbal medicine industry, creating TCM specialty products with proven clinical efficacy and high safety profiles. Third, integrate with cultural tourism and wellness industries to fully leverage Zhaotong's distinctive TCM advantages and tourism resources, establishing it as a premier destination for tourism and wellness-oriented living. Fourth, accelerate the expansion and balanced regional distribution of high-quality TCM medical resources, promote the integrated development of TCM with tourism, agriculture,

and other sectors, and build a TCM-infused health tourism industry chain. This will achieve complementary strengths and resource sharing across industries while further improving the TCM service system.

6. Conclusion

The inheritance and development of culture are pivotal to the enduring legacy of TCM's academic thought. TCM is not only a medical treasure but also a vital carrier of traditional Chinese culture. As one of Yunnan Province's three major cultural origins, Zhaotong possesses profound historical and cultural heritage. Its unique geographical location, climatic environment, and abundant medicinal plant and animal resources provide a crucial material foundation for TCM development. Therefore, by examining the development of TCM in the Zhaotong region, exploring its strengths and existing shortcomings, and proposing recommendations for the advancement of TCM in Zhaotong, this study holds significant importance for strengthening confidence in TCM culture and building a distinctive TCM cultural brand with Zhaotong characteristics.

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