

Research on the Dissemination and Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine Dietotherapy Culture

Chaohong Wu*, Yajun Li*

School of Humanities and Management, Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712044, Shaanxi Province, China

*Corresponding author: Chaohong Wu, 18090217653@163.com; Yajun Li, liyajun@vip.126.com

Copyright: © 2022 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture has seen an unprecedented rise in popularity across the world in recent years, as China's international stature has improved, and its cultural soft power has grown. At the same time, people are becoming more aware of all kinds of respiratory and cerebrovascular diseases, along with other health-concerning factors. Therefore, people are gradually casting their eyes on TCM dietotherapy culture, which has been studied by the Chinese people for thousands of years and has made indelible contributions to the prevention and treatment of diseases and the Chinese nation's longevity. However, its principle of action, prevention and control efficacy, as well as standards have been questioned; thus, its development prospects are of concern to the people. On this basis, this study explores the development status, transmission channels, and development prospects of TCM dietotherapy culture.

Keywords: Dietotherapy; Traditional Chinese medicine; Health preservation

Online publication: April 29, 2022

1. Introduction

Dietotherapy has a long history in traditional Chinese medicine. It has been growing and improving in the medical practice of generations of doctors. Its experience and prescriptions have been compiled into a book that has been passed down to this day. It has become a valuable wealth that originates from the Chinese people and is used by the Chinese people. A simple deduction of the term "dietotherapy" refers to food therapy. Under the guidance of traditional Chinese medicine's theoretical foundation and culture, as well as through the mutual cooperation of food and drugs, it can also be understood as "medicine helps food" and "food helps medicine," in order to achieve the goals of disease prevention and treatment, health preservation, and health care.

2. Origin of TCM dietotherapy

Tracing back to the source, Huangdi Neijing is the cornerstone of dietotherapy. This book presented the systematic theory of "dietotherapy" in one fell swoop in the practice and application of TCM dietotherapy in the Spring and Autumn period as well as the Warring States period. To begin, the "spleen and stomach theory" and the "four Qi and five tastes theory" are used to epitomize the digestive physiology and food performance, respectively. Based on practical experience, it also proposed relevant theories closely related to TCM dietotherapy, such as "adjusting measures to time," "eating again," "eating with festival,"

“harmony of five flavors,” “dietary taboo,” and “preventing before diseases attack,” so as to promote the development of TCM dietotherapy culture in one fell swoop.

On this basis, the medical practitioners of past dynasties also conducted research and practice on TCM dietotherapy, presenting their own distinct viewpoints one after another. The most representative of these are Sheng Nong’s Herbal Classic and Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases in the Han Dynasty, Invaluable Prescriptions for Ready Reference and Dietetic Materia Medica in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Yinshan Zhengzheng in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, as well as Compendium of Materia Medica in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. They have promoted the great development of dietotherapy culture in classic prescriptions, storage methods, cooking methods, etc. and further put forward many dietotherapy theories, such as “dialectical feeding,” “homology of medicine and food,” and “tonifying shape with shape.” It is the effort of doctors that propels the TCM dietotherapy culture to shine brightly in modern society ^[1].

3. Current situation of the dissemination and development of TCM dietotherapy culture

The dietotherapy culture in traditional Chinese medicine is the distinctive contribution of Chinese doctors to the prevention and treatment of various diseases and the diet culture across the world. With the continual advancement of its own theoretical system, it has gained recognition from people from all walks of life, nationalities, neighboring countries, and even many European and American countries. The TCM dietotherapy culture has braved the wind and waves on the road of communication and ushered in great development opportunities.

3.1. Achieving effective results from the theory and practice of TCM dietotherapy

As early as in modern times, dietotherapy and medicated diet were put forward as independent disciplines, which promoted them to be fully valued and improved in theory and practical application. Dietotherapy has spawned a plethora of works. The Family Medicinal Diet compiled by Kuiqin Gu and others, the Chinese Dietotherapy series compiled by Yongxin Xie, and the Chinese Dietotherapy Series edited by Jiaqi Shen and others are among the representative works, which have served as a guiding light for the practice of dietotherapy in the modern era. In addition, the dietotherapy culture has gradually expanded to the fields of food science and pharmacology, dietotherapy mechanism research, dietotherapy product industrialization, and so on, in which medicated diet is one of them. Under the guidance of traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy, a large number of experts, scholars, and clinicians have come together to form professional teams to carry out experimental research and clinical research on medicated diet. Furthermore, as a result of the reform and opening-up, relevant industrial chains are steadily establishing and developing, reaping the benefits of the times. From the well-known monkey mushroom biscuits, hawthorn cakes, jujube tremella soup, black chicken mushroom noodles, “Qiyi cake” and “Yipi cake” that are made by Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine with reference to the “Records of Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine in Combination” to the health-preserving traditional Chinese medicine milk tea shop that has gradually become popular to cater to the market of young people, they are all functional food that have the effect of food nutrition and food therapy. Other than being palatable, they can strengthen the spleen, nourish, preserve health, and function in disease prevention and control.

3.2. Preventing and treating diseases with TCM dietotherapy

Dietotherapy has evolved over time under the traditional Chinese medicine theory. It establishes a relationship between food and drugs based on the characteristics of food itself and the representation of certain diseases, in order to promote daily available food to achieve the effect of “distinguishing symptoms, feeding, and regulating viscera” by complementing various drugs after screening, compatibility, and cooking, along with a variety of administration methods, while enhancing the therapeutic effect of drugs.

It can also achieve the purpose of cure. In the prevention and treatment of wind-cold, people often use ginger, fresh orange peel, brown sugar, and other ingredients, mixed with an appropriate amount of water to boil and drink while hot. On the other hand, warm peppermint porridge can be consumed in the treatment of wind-heat cold. The process of making the porridge is as follows: fry the peppermint, cool the medicinal juice, add water to cook the japonica rice, and add the peppermint juice as well as an appropriate amount of rock sugar to the porridge when it is about to be completed. These two folk food therapies are known to be beneficial in the prevention of cold and the treatment of early cold ^[2].

In addition, according to experts, scholars, and clinicians, dietotherapy complements Chinese medicine in the treatment of complicated liver-fire-hyperactivity-type hypertension, gastric ulcer, early diabetes, and other diseases. At the same time, dietotherapy has also been proven to have corresponding effect in children's health, nutritional rehabilitation, postpartum care, health conditioning, elderly health, sports rehabilitation, and so on. With the establishment of dietotherapy training classes, dietotherapy nutritionist training schools, and relevant traditional Chinese medicine dietotherapy and nutrition institutions springing up, the effect of TCM dietotherapy has been gradually recognized by the public. While helping to prevent and control diseases, it can also bring huge economic benefits to relevant personnel and provide business opportunities with significant growth potential. It has also set a groundwork for the continued development and dissemination of TCM dietotherapy culture on a mass and commercial scale.

3.3. Disseminating TCM dietotherapy culture at home and abroad

At home, in addition to the well-known classic works of TCM dietotherapy and characteristic food, China's ethnic minorities have also formed a unique dietotherapy culture under the guidance of their national characteristics and traditional Chinese medicine culture. The unique dietotherapy culture of ethnic minorities is based on their national customs, with rich and colorful animals and plants, raw materials, as well as national eating habits that have seen adapted to local and time conditions. Taking Naxi and Lahu nationalities in Yunnan as an example, they have a long history of "flower eating" customs. In their view, they can use cauliflower, azaleas, and Camellia as food and medicine. These flowers are usually stewed with pork, or mashed into pulp, and then mixed with other medicinal ingredients for external application to treat all kinds of traumatic injuries. In Southwest China, the Dai ethnic group is also a minority. Under the guidance of "four pagodas and five aggregates," the children of Dai have created a unique diet with Dai flavor based on different solar terms, ages, and physiques, which can nourish the body and prevent diseases. In the process of practicing and applying TCM dietotherapy, ethnic minorities have gradually developed distinctive dietotherapy and medicated meals, such as medicinal dishes, medicinal rice, medicinal wine, medicinal tea, and medicinal flowers, all of which have become valuable assets in the Chinese nation's treasure house of dietotherapy in traditional Chinese medicine ^[3].

The most famous work on dietotherapy is Avicenna's Medical Code. In his work, he repeatedly mentioned the matching methods and taboos of daily things, and he graded drugs on the basis of edible food and medicinal food. In addition, the research on dietotherapy and medicated diet is mostly focused in neighboring countries, among which Japan and South Korea have achieved the most fruitful results in this area. The notion of dietotherapy and medicated diet became widely acknowledged and appreciated in its own practical application, thanks to the medical pioneers of many nations who carried our country's traditional Chinese medicine culture to their country. South Korea particularly emphasizes on the application of dietotherapy to daily diet. For example, spicy fermented cabbage, also known as Korean kimchi, which is a staple food in Korean cuisine, is a daily food made of Chinese cabbage after fermentation. It has been proven to have a certain effect in promoting gastrointestinal digestion, inhibiting the growth of harmful bacteria, and fighting against skin aging, which is also a manifestation of "syndrome differentiation and feeding." One of the reasons why Japan is focusing more on dietotherapy and medicated diet in the

modern society is that the phenomenon of “population aging” is common in the country. Therefore, due to the public’s concern and needs, experts and scholars are determined to study the mechanism of action and production methods of dietotherapy and medicated diet, as well as make use of its advanced high-tech industrial system to achieve outstanding progress in the industrialization of TCM dietotherapy and medicated diet and venture into the international market. As a result, TCM dietotherapy and medicated diets have progressively gained acceptance in Europe and America as types of “natural therapy.” With the widespread emergence of traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy organizations in Germany and the United States, traditional Chinese medicine has gradually progressively grown at home and abroad ^[4].

4. Strategies for the dissemination and development of TCM dietotherapy culture

Dietotherapy as a culture has evolved quickly in recent years. This indicates that while facing development opportunities, it will also meet challenges. Therefore, solutions to various existing problems have been proposed in order to emphasize its distinct benefits and achieve sustainable development.

4.1. Strive to promote the cultivation of talents majoring in traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy

At present, traditional Chinese medicine teams and professionals have been promoting the continuous development of basic research in theory and practice, but research on dietotherapy and medicated diet is still in a disadvantaged. We have not made a breakthrough in dietotherapy mechanism, medicated diet compatibility, and contemporary dietary taboos. The main reason is the lack of TCM dietotherapy talents. In view of their particularity, such talents need to master medical professional knowledge, develop proficiency in various professional knowledge, such as diet, cooking, and nutrition, as well as have high comprehensive ability. Therefore, these talents urgently need professional training ^[5].

In order to address this issue, we must begin with colleges and universities, where we have to promote this specialization, sustainable education, and the teaching of traditional Chinese medicine as well as dietotherapy. It is necessary to develop innovative teaching materials of traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy that are in line with the times. Besides mastering the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, talents should also learn the necessary knowledge and theoretical system of food engineering, cooking, and nutrition, so as to lay a solid foundation for the cultivation of professionals. Secondly, organizations, institutions, associations, and groups related to traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy in the society should also focus on cultivating traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy professionals. It is necessary to carry out in-depth cooperation with colleges and universities to provide a comprehensive service platform for personnel training, such as professional knowledge learning, professional theory application, professional practice training, and other ventures. Finally, professional research and consulting institutions specializing in traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy should be established, in order to provide strong support for theoretical knowledge breakthroughs and innovation, alleviate the professional development bottleneck, and eliminate the disadvantage of talent training.

4.2. Focus on promoting the industrialization of traditional Chinese medicine dietotherapy

At present, the TCM dietotherapy and medicated diet industry has begun to take shape in China, and a number of distinctive dietotherapy and medicated diet products have been developed, spanning a wide variety of categories and business modes. However, traditional Chinese medicine dietotherapy lacks a highly representative distinctive industry at the moment, and its performance in specialized business modes, industrial chain supply, basic theoretical research, product innovation, as well as research and development is uneven.

In order to solve these problems, first of all, we need to integrate the modern dietotherapy industry and realize the scale of industrial development while promoting the standardization of the industry. Secondly, we should carry out all-round cooperation with research institutions, such as colleges and universities, as well as provide financial, training, and practical supports for the cultivation of TCM dietotherapy talents while using professionals to achieve basic theoretical breakthroughs and product innovation. New internet technology can also be used to create new e-commerce platforms and to share network dividends. In addition, we should innovate the business philosophy rather than sticking to the traditional ways that promote the stagnation of specific industries. Taking dietotherapy and medicated food restaurants as an example, we should reasonably preset customer groups and launch special medicated food packages for different ages based on market research and in line with the traditional theory of “syndrome differentiation and feeding.” Taking students as an example, they should pick cheaper food materials or prepare therapeutic medicated meals for the goals of beauty, Qi, and blood based on their consumption ability. For middle-aged and elderly groups, relevant packages can be launched while considering the price, along with the goals of disease prevention and healthcare. Finally, efforts should be made to realize industrial standardization, the most important of which are industrial system norms and product quality norms. Only on the basis of ensuring that the sources of food materials and medicinal materials are regular and the quality is guaranteed, can we ensure the quality control of industrialized finished products, provide the market and consumers with quality-guaranteed and effective diet products, as well as promote the sustainable development of the dietotherapy industry [6].

4.3. Strive to improve the legal and normative system related to traditional Chinese medicine dietotherapy

At present, there are issues in dietotherapy-related industries, from the norms of available food and medicinal materials to product quality standards, from market supervision and management norms to punishment mechanisms, the norms of basic theoretical knowledge related to the talent training system, university education and teaching standards, as well as the selection of professional teaching materials. In particular, the lack of market supervision and the flawed legal supervision system have led to active criminals promoting all kinds of “folk prescriptions” and selling fake products in the name of dietotherapy and health experts, resulting in people’s lack of trust in dietotherapy and medicated diet products; moreover, blind attempts, resulting in wrong cognition, have greatly hindered the dissemination and development of dietotherapy. Therefore, it is urgent to improve the legal and normative system related to dietotherapy in traditional Chinese medicine.

In view of such problems, it is necessary to primarily improve the relevant legal system related to food and drug safety and the market supervision and management, as well as establish a punishment mechanism. Only in this way will we be able to address the issue of shoddy food and medicinal materials, fake and shoddy related products, and being swindled by criminals at the source, thereby raising people’s awareness of dietotherapy and paving the way for its rapid development. Moreover, in view of the current regulatory loopholes, the Food and Drug Administration and relevant law enforcement departments should cooperate with the masses in joint supervision and management, establish a “reward reporting” mechanism, and strengthen punishment, so as to break the long-term shackles of the development of dietotherapy.

4.4. Focus on the dissemination of diversified TCM dietotherapy culture

Although the TCM dietotherapy culture has long been infiltrating into the daily drip of Chinese people’s life, people do not have a clear understanding of the mechanism of medicated diet, nor do they have the professional understanding that dietotherapy can prevent and treat diseases. People generally hold a polarized view of traditional Chinese medicine diet, which either disregards its due auxiliary curative effect

or overestimates the efficacy of traditional Chinese medicine diet in the prevention and treatment of diseases. Moreover, it has failed to distinguish the groups, seasons, administration methods, and cooking methods of medicated diet and dietotherapy under the theory of “syndrome differentiation and feeding.” On the contrary, it has abused the concept of “supplementing the form with the form,” which often wastes money, with more lost than gain [7].

In view of such problems, it may be helpful to use the internet and new media technology. In this information age where everyone is involved in self-media, the dietotherapy culture can increase its exposure through new media technology. Taking the short video platform as an example, dietotherapy professionals can create a special column on dietotherapy and health culture, clarify the action mechanism of dietotherapy in combination with basic theoretical knowledge, and establish correct concepts of health preservation for the people. At the same time, it may promote excellent medicated diet and therapeutic products, which not only promotes the development of the industry, but also ensues economic returns. As the new media technology platform can effectively push and obtain relevant information by various means and in a targeted manner, the exposure rate and recognition of TCM dietotherapy culture can be increased. It allows immediate feedback, provides materials for scientific research, and provides ways for product improvement for various user evaluations. In addition, we should also offer courses related to traditional Chinese medicine and dietotherapy in traditional Chinese medicine universities, medical colleges, and medical professional colleges, so as to cultivate professionals who are passionate about TCM diet.

5. Conclusion

Traditional Chinese medicine dietotherapy culture is an ordinary yet significant science of wisdom. Many predecessors have been committed to the exploration of the basic theory of TCM dietotherapy, the arrangement of classic dietotherapy compatibility prescriptions, and the study of its mechanism. After years of painstaking efforts, TCM dietotherapy culture has finally penetrated thousands of households. With the support of national policies and the control of relevant legal supervision system, an ideal industrial system has been gradually established, so as to launch various professional dietotherapy and medicated diet products in line with “disease differentiation and feeding,” so as to promote the flourishing of the dietotherapy industrial market. We hope that the emergence of a large number of TCM dietotherapy practitioners would lead to a breakthrough in the basic theory of dietotherapy. In the near future, TCM dietotherapy will eventually support half the sky with its scientificity and effectiveness in the related fields of adjuvant treatment of complex and miscellaneous diseases. We sincerely hope that the TCM dietotherapy culture can further benefit the public and contribute to the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture and the revitalization of the traditional Chinese medicine industry.

Funding

Shaanxi University Philosophy and Social Sciences Characteristic Discipline Project Research on the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine Characteristic Culture (Project Number: SJW200906).

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Yao J, Guo Y, Dong Y, et al., 2012, Research Progress of Food Therapy in Traditional Chinese

Medicine. PLA Journal of Nursing, 29(03): 38-39, 59.

- [2] Sun L, 2011, Prevention and Cure of Cold with Traditional Chinese Medicine and Diet. China Medical Guide, 9(20): 338-339.
- [3] Qin Z, 2012, Research Status and Thinking of Dietary Therapy for Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan. Journal of Yunnan University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 35(04): 65-67.
- [4] Xu R, Liang Z, Li J, 2014, Overview of the Development of Chinese Medicine Diet Therapy in Japan. World Journal of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine, 9(12): 1357-1358.
- [5] Bai H, Chen J, Zhao K, 2020, Discussion on the Present Situation and Development Countermeasures of Medicinal Diet in China. Guangdong Chemical Industry, 47(01): 98-99.
- [6] Wang H, Jiang J, Jia Q, 2021, Application and Promotion of Chinese Medicine Diet. Modern Food, 2021(19): 118-120.
- [7] Li L, 2016, Dietotherapy Can Help Spread Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture. China Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, May 23, 2016, 003.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.