

# Optimizing Teaching Strategies for Traditional Chinese Medicine Classics Courses: A Survey-Based Study on Overseas Undergraduate Students in China

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**Abstract**—Based on a questionnaire survey of overseas undergraduate students majoring in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) across multiple grades at Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, China this study systematically analyzes the current status of TCM classics course learning from four dimensions: demographic characteristics of students, prior exposure to TCM, learning attitudes and evaluations, and teaching expectations. It explores the underlying causes of key issues such as "moderate learning outcomes" and "insufficient independent reading time" and proposes targeted optimization strategies aligned with students' actual needs. The findings provide empirical support for enhancing the teaching quality of TCM classics courses for international students and promoting the internationalization of TCM education.

**Keywords**—Traditional Chinese Medicine, classics courses, overseas undergraduate students.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has gained increasing international recognition as both a medical system and a component of cultural heritage, resulting in a steady rise in the number of international students pursuing TCM education in China. The Belt and Road Initiative has further facilitated this process by providing an institutional and cultural framework that supports the global dissemination and integration of TCM [1].

The *Huangdi Neijing* (Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor), *Shanghan Lun* (Treatise on Febrile Diseases), *Jin Gui Yao Lue* (Synopsis of the Golden Chamber), and *Wenbing Xue* (Doctrine of Epidemic Febrile Diseases) are collectively recognized as the four foundational classical texts in TCM education. As core courses in undergraduate TCM programs, these classics encapsulate the theoretical foundations and clinical wisdom of TCM and play a pivotal role in cultivating students' TCM thinking and clinical reasoning abilities [2]. However, overseas undergraduate students often encounter substantial challenges in mastering these courses due to differences in language proficiency, cultural background, and cognitive frameworks when compared with domestic Chinese students [3].

In response to these issues, this study aims to investigate the key difficulties, bottlenecks, and deficiencies in the teaching and learning process of TCM classics courses. On this basis, targeted optimization countermeasures are proposed to provide empirical support for improving the teaching quality of TCM classics courses, enhancing students' learning

effectiveness and TCM thinking cultivation, and advancing the internationalization of TCM education.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### A. Research Respondents

The study recruited overseas undergraduate students (including international students and those Chinese students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) majoring in TCM from the 2019 to 2024 (six consecutive grade levels) at the School of International Education, Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, China.

### B. Survey Methodology

This study employed a questionnaire-based survey design. Data were collected using an anonymous, web-based questionnaire distributed via Wenjuanxing, a professional online survey platform. The survey link was disseminated to eligible respondents through WeChat, QQ, and email. Upon completion of data collection, the responses were exported from Wenjuanxing for subsequent statistical analysis.

### C. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was developed by the research team and reviewed by experts to ensure scientific validity and methodological rigor. It collected demographic and background information, including gender, grade, place of origin, and family background in TCM. Learning-related questions comprised 19 items, primarily multiple-choice questions with both single- and multiple-response formats. The questionnaire was structured around three core domains: learning status, existing challenges, and proposed recommendations. It assessed respondents' attitudes toward learning TCM classics, learning interest, level of mastery, degree of engagement, learning methods, and learning content.

## III. RESULTS

### A. Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 37 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis. Of the respondents, 40.54% were male and 59.46% were female. First-year students were excluded because TCM classics courses had not yet been introduced at that stage of the curriculum. Fifth-year students (43.24%) and graduate students (51.35%) together accounted for over 90% of the sample, whereas second- and third-year students

represented only 2.7%. This distribution indicated that the majority of respondents had substantial exposure to core TCM courses and a solid academic foundation, thereby enhancing the practical relevance and reliability of their responses.

In terms of place of origin, 70.27% of respondents were from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, while 29.73% were from Southeast Asia; no respondents were from Western countries. This indicated that the overseas student group was primarily concentrated in regions with strong cultural ties to TCM, minimizing potential learning barriers related to cultural differences. Southeast Asia is China's third-largest trading partner and a key region for the implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative. Its geographical proximity to Guangxi, similar cultural background, and comparable disease spectrum further reduce learning obstacles. Guangxi has historically been a popular destination for Southeast Asian students pursuing TCM studies [4].

The survey also revealed that 70.27% of respondents had no family members engaged in TCM-related occupations, indicating weak familial exposure to TCM, whereas only 29.73% reported a family background in TCM. These findings suggested that most students relied primarily on formal education rather than familial guidance to engage with TCM classics, highlighting the importance of strengthening the foundational role of classroom instruction in TCM classics.

#### *B. Students' Learning Attitudes and Classics Preferences*

The survey indicated that overseas students generally held a positive perception of TCM classics courses and demonstrated a strong willingness to learn, although their practical engagement remained limited. Among respondents, 86.49% had previously taken TCM classics courses, and 75.68% considered these courses "very helpful" for TCM learning. All respondents (100%) recognized that studying TCM classics promoted the development of TCM thinking, 67.57% considered it "very helpful" for clinical practice, and 72.97% reported that they would voluntarily study the classics outside of class. These findings suggested a high level of consensus regarding the value of TCM classics courses and a strong motivation to engage in learning.

Regarding course preferences, 81.08% of respondents considered *Huangdi Neijing* particularly important, while 78.38% emphasized the value of *Shanghan Lun* and *Jin Gui Yao Lue*. In contrast, *Nanjing* (29.73%) and *Wenbing Xue* (27.03%) were considered less important. This indicated a higher recognition of core classics, suggesting that prioritizing these texts in TCM classics instruction may enhance student engagement and participation.

However, the survey revealed that 56.76% of respondents spent less than 30 minutes per week studying TCM classics, while only 5.41% dedicated two hours or more. Moreover, 67.57% of respondents rated their learning outcomes as average, indicating a "high recognition–low investment–moderate effect" pattern. These findings suggested that although students acknowledged the value of TCM classics, their actual study time was insufficient, and the resulting learning outcomes fell short of expectations. Factors such as limited learning interest, the abstruse nature of classical texts,

and a lack of clinical practice opportunities contributed to suboptimal mastery of TCM classics.

#### *C. Teaching Feedback and Problem Analysis*

The survey identified three main challenges in TCM classics courses for overseas students: rigid teaching methods, a lack of integration between theory and clinical practice, and insufficient teaching resources. Respondents expressed a preference for case-based and interactive teaching approaches, with greater opportunities for case discussions and enhanced teacher–student interaction.

Currently, most TCM classics courses for overseas students still follow the traditional mode of "classroom reading and original text recitation." Among respondents, 59.46% reported that these courses were boring, emphasized rote recitation over comprehension, and did not align with students' preference for practical, application-oriented learning. This mismatch contributed to low classroom engagement and participation, which ultimately affected perceived learning outcomes.

Survey results indicated that 86.49% of respondents preferred case inquiry-based teaching, 54.05% favored problem-based teaching, and 72.97% expected increased teacher–student interaction during class. Additionally, 54.05% believed that the allocated class hours for TCM classics courses were insufficient, while only 48.65% supported traditional teacher-centered instruction. These findings suggested that students were dissatisfied with conventional one-way teaching and favored more practical, interactive, and student-centered approaches.

Another key challenge identified was the disconnection between TCM classics instruction and clinical practice. 72.97% of respondents reported that classics courses emphasized theory over clinical application, making it difficult to translate classical knowledge into clinical thinking and skills. Although respondents recognized the value of TCM classics, their learning investment—such as weekly study time—remained limited due to the difficulty of applying theory to practice, creating a cycle in which learning and clinical application remained disconnected.

In addition, 37.84% of respondents reported that TCM classics courses did not fully utilize online resources, and 54.05% indicated that the allocated class hours were insufficient. Several factors may have contributed to these issues. First, the school had not established an online learning platform tailored for overseas students, such as bilingual classics interpretations or case-study videos, limiting students' access to supplementary learning resources outside of class. Second, within the existing class hours, teachers were unable to fully implement the preferred instructional approach of "theoretical explanation, case analysis, and interactive practice," resulting in superficial learning and further amplifying the problem of insufficient reading time.

#### *D. Suggestions on the Reform of TCM Classics Courses*

The survey revealed that overseas students' suggestions for reforming TCM classics courses primarily focused on expanding resources and integrating mentorship with formal school education, while de-emphasizing examination-oriented

approaches. Among the respondents, 64.86% recommended enriching online course content and enhancing resource sharing, 59.46% expressed interest in participating in lectures or exchange activities, and 54.05% suggested adopting an integrated model combining school education with mentorship. In contrast, fewer students favored reforms such as academic competitions (43.24%), group study (24.32%), or proficiency tests (24.32%). These results indicated that students were more concerned with enhancing teaching resources and innovating traditional teaching models, and placed relatively low emphasis on competition- or examination-oriented reforms.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the survey findings, several strategies were proposed to enhance the teaching of TCM classics courses for overseas students.

##### A. Innovating Teaching Methods and Optimizing Teaching Models

To enhance the teaching of TCM classics to overseas students, it is essential to consider the latest developments in international education models and the local traditional medicine systems of students' home countries. Identifying similarities and differences between TCM and local traditional medicine can inform the design of tailored teaching models. In practice, teaching quality can be improved by emphasizing students' understanding of traditional Chinese culture and employing diverse instructional methods [5].

Introducing innovative teaching approaches, particularly case-based exploration, can enhance both interaction and practical application. By integrating classical TCM theories with real clinical cases, this method enables students to move from rote memorization to applied clinical reasoning, facilitating deeper understanding and mastery of TCM classics.

##### B. Expanding Resources and Optimizing Class Hours and Content

To enrich online learning resources, it is recommended to develop a bilingual learning platform that provides vernacular interpretations of TCM classics, case databases, and practice exercises to support students' independent study and compensate for limited class hours. Online interactions can be further enhanced by assigning pre-class case-study tasks through platforms such as Xuexitong or Zhihuishu and promoting classroom engagement using real-time comments and online discussions.

##### C. Implementing Diversified Supportive Activities

To strengthen supportive learning, lectures and exchange meetings can be organized to facilitate the sharing of students' experiences in classics learning and cultivate a positive learning environment. In addition, a mentorship model, pairing students with mentors specialized in TCM classics, can be introduced to deepen students' understanding of classical texts and promote the practical application of knowledge during clinical practice.

#### V. CONCLUSION

TCM classics courses play a crucial role in the education of overseas undergraduate students majoring in TCM. Overseas students generally demonstrate a high level of recognition of the value of these courses. Based on questionnaire data, this study identified key challenges in TCM classics teaching and proposed targeted strategies to address them. The implementation of these measures is expected to enhance the quality and effectiveness of TCM classics instruction, improve students' learning outcomes, and contribute to the cultivation of high-quality talents for the benefit of both local communities and the global development of TCM.

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