

Research on Characteristic Development Path of TCM Health Care Major in Vocational Education

Ruize Gao^{1*}

¹ Zibo Vocational and Technical University, Zibo, China

*Correspondence: Ruize Gao

Received: 7 May 2026; **Accepted:** 26 May 2026; **Published:** 17 June 2026

Abstract:

Under the background of the full implementation of the Healthy China strategy, the inheritance and innovation of TCM cause, and the deepening of population aging, the big health and health care industry has ushered in explosive growth. Relying on the unique advantage of “preventive treatment of disease”, TCM health care has become an important support for grassroots health services. TCM health care majors in vocational colleges are the main positions for cultivating technical and skilled talents in health care. At present, the scale of running this major in China and Shandong Province continues to expand, but there are widespread problems such as homogeneous school-running, vague characteristic positioning, prominent shortcomings in teachers and practical training, obvious differences in students' learning situations, and prominent structural contradictions in employment. This paper sorts out the development status of TCM health care major in China and Shandong Province, systematically analyzes the bottlenecks of major development, characteristics of students' learning situations and employment dilemmas, puts forward characteristic development paths from the aspects of precise positioning, curriculum reconstruction, teachers and practical training, and hierarchical education, and predicts the future development direction of the major towards refinement, compound, regional branding and industry standardization, providing a reference for the connotation construction of majors in vocational colleges, the reform of talent training mode and serving the development of local health care industry.

Keywords:

Vocational Education, TCM Health Care, Major Characteristics, Learning Situation Analysis, Employment Bottleneck, Talent Training

1. Current Development Status of TCM Health Care Major

1.1. National Development Status

The Healthy China 2030 Planning Outline clearly proposes to vigorously develop TCM health care services and improve the health service system covering the whole life cycle [1]. Driven by policy dividends, vocational colleges at secondary and higher vocational levels across China have set up TCM health care majors one after another, forming a large-scale school-running pattern covering all provinces, cities and counties. The professional talent training is mainly for grassroots positions such as

TCM clinics, preventive treatment centers, health care institutions, physical examination centers, and community health service stations. The curriculum is mainly based on basic TCM theories, appropriate TCM techniques, health management, and health care practice [2].

On the whole, the major has a wide coverage and stable enrollment scale nationwide. Most colleges implement the education mode of post-curriculum-competition-certificate integration and industry-education integration, which can meet the demand for basic service talents in the industry. However, it also presents the problems of “emphasizing scale over connotation, wide coverage without characteristics”. The talent training programs, curriculum systems and practical training contents are highly identical, lacking differentiated direction setting, and it is difficult to adapt to the professional talent demand of segmented tracks such as elderly health care, postpartum conditioning, chronic disease care and residential health care. There is a long-term shortage of high-end refined health care talents [3].

1.2. Development Status in Shandong Province

As a birthplace of TCM culture, a populous province and an aging province, Shandong is rich in health care resources and has a strong market demand for grassroots health care, providing a unique industrial foundation for the development of TCM health care major. Vocational colleges in various cities of the province have set up this major, relying on Qilu TCM culture, folk health care techniques and local medicinal diet resources to carry out talent training for community health care, elderly care institutions, TCM health centers and county-level medical and health complexes [4].

Many colleges in Shandong have built on-campus training centers and off-campus school-enterprise cooperation bases. Some colleges have tried to integrate Qilu traditional health care exercises and local TCM folk skills, initially forming a regional school-running prototype. However, compared with mature majors such as nursing and acupuncture and massage, TCM health care major has shallow school-running accumulation and low social recognition, insufficient distinctive identification of professional characteristics, low matching degree between talent training and post standards of high-end residential health care, community home-based elderly care and medical and health care institutions in Shandong, and the industrial advantages have not been effectively transformed into professional school-running advantages.

2. Bottlenecks in Major Development

2.1. Serious Homogenization of School-Running and Lack of Characteristic Positioning

Most vocational colleges in China copy each other's talent training programs for TCM health care major, with similar curriculum structure, teaching content and practical training projects, and do not carry out differentiated positioning combined with regional industrial structure and local health care needs [5]. The professional boundary is blurred, which can neither highlight the technical difference from acupuncture and massage, nor lack the TCM health care core different from health management major, resulting in no bright spots in school-running and no advantages in employment. Some colleges still adopt the traditional medical teaching mode of emphasizing theory over practice, and the attribute of vocational education of skill education is not fully reflected.

2.2. Insufficient Double-Qualified Teachers and Lagging Practical Training System

Most professional teachers have a pure theoretical teaching background, with solid TCM theoretical foundation but lack of front-line working experience in health care, and insufficient mastery of new industry technologies, service processes and store operation specifications [6]. The mechanism of inviting industry technicians, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and enterprise executives to teach part-time is not perfect, and the structure of double-qualified teams is unreasonable. At the same time, some colleges have a single configuration of practical training equipment, which can only carry out basic training such as massage and moxibustion, lacking practical training scenarios such as constitution identification, medicinal diet production, chronic disease health care simulation and intelligent health care equipment operation. School-enterprise cooperation mostly stays at the level of internship placement, and in-depth industry-education integration of curriculum co-construction, teacher co-education and project co-research is insufficient.

3. Analysis of Students' Learning Situation

The students of TCM health care major in vocational colleges are mainly recruited through unified enrollment at secondary and higher vocational levels, with distinct learning situation characteristics. First, weak cultural and theoretical foundation, difficult to understand abstract theories such as basic TCM, meridians and collaterals, and TCM diagnosis, low learning initiative, and fragmented knowledge mastery [7]. Second, strong willingness to practice and high practical comprehension, students generally prefer practical training courses such as moxibustion, scraping and massage, which are suitable for the vocational education training mode of learning by doing and practicing in posts. Third, vague professional cognition and low professional identity, most students do not understand the professional connotation when entering school, confuse health care with medical diagnosis and treatment, and one-sidedly believe that posts have low technical content and small development space. Fourth, obvious individual differences, some students are good at technical practice, some are good at communication service and operation management, unified teaching is difficult to meet personalized growth needs, resulting in uneven training quality.

4. Analysis of Employment Bottlenecks

4.1. Deviation in Social Cognition and Low Post Recognition

The public often equates TCM health care with ordinary health massage, ignoring its professional value of constitution identification, sub-health intervention, chronic disease care and four-season health preservation [8]. Medical institutions have unclear post definition for this major, and preventive treatment centers and clinical auxiliary posts prefer to recruit graduates of clinical, nursing and acupuncture and massage majors, restricting the access channels for students of health care major. Most of them can only enter small and medium-sized health centers and stores to engage in basic services, with low post level and low added value.

4.2. Mismatch Between Talent Ability and Industrial Demand

The health care industry is upgrading towards refinement, quality and intelligence, and the industry urgently needs compound talents with TCM technology + health assessment + service etiquette + operation science popularization + digital application [9]. However, the existing teaching focuses on single skill training, lacking courses

such as health care store management, new media health science popularization, intelligent health care equipment application, postpartum and elderly special conditioning, resulting in insufficient comprehensive literacy of students, and structural employment contradictions of saturation in low-end posts and shortage of high-end compound posts.

4.3. Unsmooth Career Promotion Channel and Disordered Certificate System

The industry is dominated by small, medium and micro private enterprises with low standardization, imperfect post levels, assessment standards and promotion mechanisms. Graduates stay in basic service posts for a long time, with slow salary increase and low career development ceiling. At the same time, there are many kinds of relevant vocational certificates with uneven gold content, lack of unified industry access and evaluation standards, which are difficult to become effective support for graduates' employment competition and post promotion.

5. Characteristic Development Path of TCM Health Care Major

5.1. Base on Regional Endowments and Build Qilu Characteristic Professional Positioning

Colleges in Shandong should rely on Qilu TCM culture, aging status and the advantages of medical and health care integration industry, and establish the characteristic positioning of "TCM preventive treatment + elderly health care + constitution conditioning + Qilu health culture" [10]. Avoid homogeneous competition, set characteristic directions such as community home-based health care, elderly chronic disease conditioning, Qilu medicinal diet health care, and traditional health care exercises, integrate folk appropriate TCM techniques, local medicinal diet formulas and Qilu health care intangible cultural heritage skills into the curriculum, forming a regional professional brand of "unique advantages and superior quality".

5.2. Integrate Post-Curriculum-Competition-Certificate and Reconstruct Modular Curriculum System

According to professional teaching standards and industry post needs, streamline redundant theories, strengthen practical modules, and embed the assessment contents of vocational skill level certificates, elderly caregivers and TCM physiotherapy special abilities into daily teaching. Implement project-based and case-based teaching, take real health care service cases and store service projects as carriers, strengthen the cultivation of practical skills such as constitution identification, four-season health preservation, chronic disease health care and postpartum care, and realize the seamless connection between learning content and post standards.

5.3. Strengthen Double-Qualified Team and Improve Industry-Education Integration Practical Training Conditions

Improve the system of teachers' enterprise attachment and follow-up study to enhance teachers' industry practical ability; employ industry experts, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage and health care store managers to teach part-time to optimize the teacher structure. Build high-standard TCM constitution identification rooms, appropriate technology training rooms, medicinal diet research and development rooms, and health care simulation stores. Rely on local medical and health care groups, community health service centers and TCM hospitals' preventive

treatment centers to carry out order training and modern apprenticeship, realizing school-enterprise collaborative education.

5.4. Adapt to Learning Situation Characteristics and Implement Hierarchical and Classified Education

In view of the characteristics of students' weak theory and strong practice, implement the teaching mode of simplified theory and strengthened practice; carry out hierarchical training according to skill-oriented, service-oriented and operation-oriented, and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Carry out regular professional cognitive education and career planning lectures, correct students' cognitive bias, enhance professional identity and industry self-confidence, and guide students to achieve long-term development, independent entrepreneurship or further study in the health care industry.

6. Future Development Direction

First, refined training direction. The major will bid farewell to extensive general training, and deeply cultivate segmented tracks such as elderly health care, adolescent physical intervention, postpartum TCM conditioning, chronic disease health care and residential health care to accurately match the demand for high-end health care posts.

Second, compound talent ability. On the basis of consolidating TCM health care technology, integrate intelligent health care, digital operation, new media science popularization, health file management and other contents to cultivate compound talents with both technology, service and operation.

Third, regional branding of professional school-running. Vocational colleges in Shandong will continue to dig deep into the connotation of Qilu TCM culture, link schools with local areas, align industry and education, bind major construction with local health care industry and integrated development of cultural tourism and health care, realizing the trinity of education, employment and industrial empowerment.

Fourth, standardization of industry standards. With the continuous improvement of industry supervision and vocational qualification system, professional talent training programs will dynamically connect with new norms and standards, improve the career growth and promotion channels for graduates, and promote the sustainable and high-quality development of the major.

7. Conclusions

TCM health care major in vocational education conforms to the Healthy China strategy and the health care demand of the aging society, with broad development space. At present, restricted by homogeneous school-running, weak teachers and practical training, large differences in students' learning situations and structural employment contradictions, the major urgently needs to take the road of characteristic, connotation and differentiated development. Vocational colleges should base on the national and Shandong industrial reality, accurately position professional characteristics, reconstruct curriculum system, strengthen double-qualified construction, deepen industry-education integration, adapt to hierarchical learning situations, and cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents who understand TCM, master skills, are good at service and can develop, which not only helps graduates obtain high-quality employment, but also provides talent support for the

sustainable development of TCM health care industry in Shandong Province and even the whole country.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the State Council. Healthy China 2030 Planning Outline. 2016.
- [2] Department of Vocational and Adult Education, Ministry of Education. Teaching Standards for TCM Health Care Major in Vocational Colleges (2021 Edition). Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2021.
- [3] Health Commission of Shandong Province. 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Shandong Province. 2022.
- [4] Wang, Y. Research on the development path of industry-education integration of TCM health care major in vocational colleges. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine Management*, 2023, 31(08), 186-188.
- [5] Li, J. Dilemma of homogeneous school-running and exploration of characteristic construction of TCM health care major in higher vocational colleges. *Vocational Education Research*, 2022, 06, 76-80.
- [6] Zhang, M. Current situation and countermeasures of double-qualified teachers team construction of TCM health care major. *Chinese Medicine Modern Distance Education of China*, 2022, 20(12), 165-167.
- [7] Liu, J. Research on learning situation characteristics and hierarchical teaching practice of TCM majors in higher vocational colleges. *Health Vocational Education*, 2023, 41(05), 58-60.
- [8] Chen, M. Current employment situation and optimization strategy of TCM health care major under the background of big health. *Employment and Security*, 2022, 15, 89-91.
- [9] Zhao, X.M. Analysis on the compound talent training mode of TCM health care under the upgrading of health care industry. *Industrial & Science Tribune*, 2023, 22(09), 156-158.
- [10] Sun, L.L. Research on integrating Qilu TCM culture into the characteristic construction of TCM health care major. *Shandong Education (Vocational Education Edition)*, 2023, 03, 45-47.



© 2026 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)