

• Research Article

China's growing contribution to military Chinese medicine (2005–2014): a ten-year literature survey

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: In China, people have relied on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for thousands of years to keep healthy and treat diseases. TCM also plays an important role in military health services and now forms a new discipline called military Chinese medicine (MCM). However, the type, quality and focus of research articles about MCM have not been reported. The present study was performed to analyze the growing trends of MCM and investigate China's contribution to military health services.

METHODS: China's MCM publications were retrieved from the PubMed database, as well as China National Knowledge Infrastructure, Wanfang Data and Chongqing VIP database from 2005 to 2014.

RESULTS: The study found that the number of published articles increased markedly from 2005 to 2014. Basic research studies comprised a small percentage of the literature. Among these studies, military training injury and special military environmental medicine were the most common research subjects in MCM. Military hospitals were the main institutions generating MCM literature.

CONCLUSION: The quality of MCM research is generally low, as indicated by the proportion of publications in core journals. Studies on MCM still lack high-quality publications and international cooperation.

Keywords: medicine, Chinese traditional; military Chinese medicine; literature survey

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1 Introduction

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), an important part of complementary and alternative medicine throughout the world, refers to a group of diagnostic and therapeutic disciplines developed around the basic theories of Chinese

medicine^[1]. TCM has been developed over thousands of years, and encompasses a range of techniques, such as acupuncture, massage and Chinese herbs, which are broadly accepted in clinical and therapeutic settings^[2]. Throughout recent decades, the use of TCM in many European and American countries has become

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increasingly prevalent^[3-5]. In October 2014, a study of the use of acupuncture to treat chronic knee pain was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and received great interest^[6].

In China, people have relied on TCM for thousands of years to keep healthy and treat a variety of diseases. TCM also plays a vital role in military health services in China, and now forms a new discipline called military Chinese medicine (MCM)^[7]. MCM is a special military medicine that combines modern military medical theories with TCM theories, and applies TCM techniques and herbs to prevent and treat diseases and improve battle effectiveness of the military. MCM has many advantages in military health services, such as simplicity, convenience, low cost and high efficacy. Currently, a variety of herbs and MCM techniques are extensively practiced in many military medical departments in China. In the Second Military Medical University, the curriculum of MCM has been included among required courses for several years^[7].

Apart from the wide use of MCM in the military, research on MCM is also growing. Although no journal is exclusively dedicated to MCM, there are over 200 TCM journals and over 80 military medicine journals currently in print in China. In these journals, thousands of articles are published each year. However, little is known about the scientific publications pertaining to MCM, including the quantity and quality of MCM research articles. The type, quality and focus of MCM articles have not been reported as yet. Therefore, we sought to investigate the contributions of Chinese authors in the field of MCM.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Search strategy

We conducted a literature search in the databases of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Wanfang Data, Chongqing VIP and PubMed on February 20, 2015. Limits were set on discipline type, publication time and the first author's affiliation, as follows: the medical discipline type was restricted to two fields (military medicine and TCM) in all of the Chinese databases. The publication time period was set from January 2005 to December 2014. Articles were included if the first authors were affiliated with military units. Conference papers and letters were excluded from the search results. In the PubMed database, search terms were as follows: theme = ((military) or (army) and (TCM) or (Chinese medicine)) and publishing year = (20050101–20141231). Also, articles published from 1995 to 2004 were searched in the same way to investigate historical trends in the publication of MCM research.

2.2 Data collection

Two researchers separately extracted the following

information from the included studies: journal name, publication year, first author's origin, article type (original article or review), study type (clinical study, basic study or other study) and research orientation. The data entry and collecting were separately verified by two researchers and were analyzed in Microsoft Excel 2007.

To identify the quality of the MCM research articles published, we calculated the number of articles published in the journals found in the 2014 General Contents of Chinese Core Journal of Peking University (GCCCJPU). It was assumed that publication quality was positively correlated with the proportion of articles published within these core journals.

2.3 Statistical analysis

The goal of this research was to describe trends in the type, quality and focus of MCM research. Thus, only descriptive statistics were used to explore relationships within the data.

3 Results

3.1 Total number of articles

A total of 102 articles meeting our search criteria for MCM were published worldwide from 2005 to 2014. However, the number of articles published from 1995 to 2004 was only 13 (Figure 1). The number of MCM articles published per year increased greatly from 2005 to 2014. By 2014, the annual rate of MCM article publishing had increased by more than 5 times over the 2005 rate, suggesting that the last decade witnessed a strengthened scientific capacity in MCM.

3.2 Article types and study types

Of the 102 retrieved articles, the greatest proportion of articles were original scientific research (80.4%, 82/102), followed by review articles (19.6%, 20/102). The study types were predominantly clinical (77.5%, 79/102), followed by basic (14.7%, 15/102) and "others" (*i.e.*, literature surveys; 7.8%, 8/102).

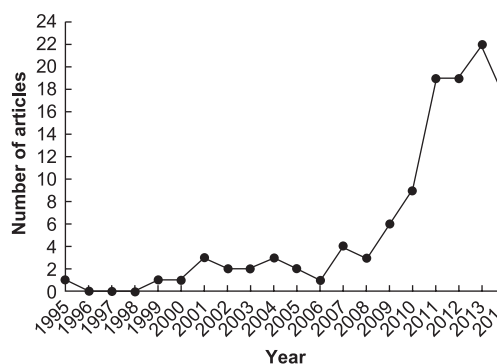


Figure 1 The number of articles about military Chinese medicine published from 1995 to 2014

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