

Italy and the Dialogue on Human Health between Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture and Western Medicine

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From May 10 to May 11, 2012 Italy hosted the first conference on the ‘Dialogue on Human Health between Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture and Western Medicine’ [1]. This dialogue between China and Europe, focusing on possible integrations of their respective medical cultures, has been concluded with the signing of the ‘Declaration of Bologna’ by Romano Prodi, president of the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation, former president of the European Union, and former Prime Minister of Italy, and Xu Jialu, former chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China. The goal is to set up a permanent round table meeting every year in a different country with the objective of building a new synergistic model of healthcare and treatment of diseases that will integrate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) knowledge and Western medical science. The event was promoted and organized by the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation, the Bonn Project, the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences (CACMS), and the School of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Bologna.

The scientific portion of the dialogue included lectures and round tables featuring some of the world’s most prominent experts on Western medicine and TCM who address history and culture, efficacy and safety, research and innovation, and cooperation between the 2 different approaches to medicine, with the goal of exploring concrete opportunities for making these 2 worlds more complementary and synergistic. The scientific meetings focused on various aspects of human health, with special attention to most common diseases, such as cardiovascular and chronic degenerative diseases. Others addressed the state of the art in research and treatment methods, the evidence-based approach and the standards applied to the clinical trials conducted in the context of TCM practice, the drawing up of monographs for the

pharmacopoeia, and the European norms on natural products. In addition to considering traditional techniques, such as acupuncture, the presentations also examined innovative scientific advances, such as a cellular technology designed to identify new pharmacological targets for natural products in human stem cells.

Sergio Stefoni, then dean of the School of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Bologna and host of the event, affirmed:

‘Physical and mental health is a key to human survival. In a society where science and technology are developing at an accelerated pace, people can reap the benefits of the available material wealth on one hand, and yet jeopardize their health on the other hand, because of overly stressful lifestyles. Today, stress is on the increase among the general public, and depression and insomnia have become common afflictions. Conditions like cardio-cerebrovascular disorders, diabetes, and respiratory disease have become so widespread that they pose serious threats to younger generations as well. In addition, chronic and degenerative diseases are on the rise due to the progressive aging of the population, putting pressure on healthcare policies world-wide, with soaring costs that weigh on the budgets of every country. It is exactly because of these world-wide challenges that we must urgently find ways to improve the health of the entire planet, drawing our inspiration from the knowledge accumulated over the centuries by Western medical science and Eastern medical culture’.

Romano Prodi, president of the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation, declared:

‘East and West have developed different cultures, values, and traditions. We have to recognize that they have not communicated enough with one another and because of that East and West had sometimes lost the opportunity to improve through mutual exchange. Both cultures have made important contributions to human progress. One of the greatest treasures of the culture of the Far East, TCM, has attracted less attention from the Western world than it deserves: What the West knows about Chinese medicine is only the tip of the iceberg. At this point in time, with difficulties around the world not only of an economic, but also social and cultural nature, it is our firm belief that an intense exchange between our cultures

can give rise, starting from Bologna. In this perspective we can progressively improve health and well-being, centered on prevention and the promotion of lifestyles that are more in tune with people's true needs. This is an example of one of the many ways in which Europe and China can better understand each other and – because of that – improve world's peace and development'.

Finally, Xu Jialu, former chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, and a renowned scholar of traditional Chinese culture, stated:

'TCM, sometimes referred to as the fifth great invention of China in addition to the compass, the gunpowder, paper-making, and printing, is *the* cream of Chinese culture. It is not an exaggeration to say that only when the world knows about TCM, we can say it knows about China. When this huge treasure trove of TCM is fully explored with the means of modern science and synergized with Western medicine, the great power it unleashes will be no less than the four great inventions have done in history'.

The 2 driving forces behind the TCM dialogue are: for China, the Bonn Project, and for Europe, the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation. The first is a non-profit group whose mission is to promote TCM world-wide, initiated by Ms. Wu Yi, ex Deputy Prime Minister of China, in the spaces left by the Chinese embassy in Bonn following the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany. The second is a non-profit organization based in Bologna, founded by Prof. Romano Prodi in 2008 with the goal of tackling the social, cultural, economic, and political challenges we face all over the world and contribute to their solution through the development of new international collaborative projects and initiatives.

The Promoters

Foundation for World Wide Cooperation

The Foundation for World Wide Cooperation is a non-profit organization based in Bologna founded by Romano Prodi in 2008 with the objective of facing social, cultural, and economic issues in the world and helping to solve them by working out new proposals of cooperation in the international context, starting in Europe as a major player in a future multipolar world in which new protagonists, such as China, India, and other emerging countries will find themselves bearing a full share of responsibility. The foundation's initiatives have the purpose of fostering a network of ideas and knowledge at international level that nurtures a cultural and political climate in which the new challenges facing humanity can be overcome.

Bonn Project

The Bonn Project is a non-profit organization initiated by Wu Yi, the then Chinese Deputy Prime Minister, and spear-

headed by Lu Qiutian, the then ambassador to Germany, in the premises left by the Chinese Embassy in Bonn after the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification, whose aim is to promote TCM and cultural exchanges with other countries in the world. Today the Bonn Project is a body with a wide range of action that fosters international cooperation by launching specific projects in the reciprocal industrial and commercial interests of the parties concerned in different scientific and technological sectors covering health, TCM trade, new forms of energy, and advanced technology.

CACMS

Founded in 1955 under the name of China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine (CATCM), now this body promotes scientific research, clinical medicine, and training in TCM. The serving president is Cao Hongxin. The academy consists of 13 institutes, 6 hospitals, a school of specialization, and a publishing house for books on ancient Chinese medicine. It publishes various scientific journals including the *Journal of TCM*, the *Chinese Journal of Integrated Traditional and Western Medicine*, and *Acupuncture Research*. CACMS has a staff of 4,000, of whom 3,200 are professionals that have specialized in different fields. It collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO) and major international scientific and medical bodies.

University of Bologna

The University of Bologna is of ancient origin, the first university in the Western world. Its history is interwoven with the lives of great names in science and letters, and it is a landmark in European culture that cannot be overlooked. The university began to take shape in 1088 when masters of grammar, rhetoric, and logic began to apply themselves to law. Nowadays, paying particular attention to research and internationalization, the University of Bologna offers more than 220 study courses in addition to masters' courses and schools of specialization that attract students from all over the world: About 48% of those enrolled come from outside the region, and Chinese students are a substantial and rapidly growing component.

Declaration of Friendship between TCM and Western Medicine

As history steps into the 21st century, the world enters into a new era, an era of peace and development, an era of communication and cooperation. However, issues regarding natural resources, global pollution, and lifestyles are creating new challenges for human health and well-being.

Mankind is becoming aware of the risks of these issues and is paying increasing attention to health and quality of life, as well as to innovation and transformation of medical theories and practices. Western and Eastern societies are becoming more and more reliant on medicine and healthcare systems, and new expectations have arisen regarding future developments in this field.

In the West of the world, thousands of years ago, Greeks and Romans started the art and the science of Western medicine. In the 15th century, in Italy, the Renaissance awoke people to science and led Western medicine onto the path of experimental research. Established on this foundation, the Western culture brought forth modern medicine with its advanced medical theories, laboratory instruments, and sophisticated healthcare management system, all of which have contributed greatly to human health. Western medicine has been able to raise life expectancy with unexpected growth rates and increased possibilities to improve human health in a way that was unthinkable only a few decades ago. These results spread around the world, including the East where Western medicine is now diffused and practiced.

In the Far East of the world, China's 5,000 year civilization has given birth to TCM. Throughout its uninterrupted long history, TCM has embodied and will continue to embody the time-honored oriental philosophical thinking and human spirit. TCM emphasizes customization based on individual conditions; takes a holistic view of both the human body and the relationship between man and nature, and seeks dynamic balance within the body system and in the man-nature system. In the process of appreciating lives and understanding our body and diseases, TCM has established its effective medical theories and practices. Now TCM is becoming more and more relevant to the West of the world because of new exchanges and because of a general need for new holistic approaches to human health.

Though TCM and Western medicine have evolved along different routes in history, both of them are significant to human health. A mechanism should be introduced to promote the communication between the 2 equally significant systems in the spirit of respect, cooperation, and mutual benefits. By doing so, we can improve academic innovation, scientific and technological invention, and industrial development.

Initiated by Mr. Prodi, chairman of the EU Commission and former Prime Minister of Italy, and by Mr. Xu Jialu, former chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, the first 'Dialogue on Human Health between TCM Culture and Western Medicine' has been held jointly by the Bonn Project and the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation together with the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences and the Medical School of the University of Bologna, on May 10th–11th, 2012 in Bologna, Italy.

The theme of the dialogue is human health against the cultural backdrop of the medicines of China and Europe. In view of history, differences, complementary nature, and cooperation of the 2 types of medicine, and by looking forward to the future of cooperation and synergy, the 150 representatives from China and Europe acclaimed this conference.

The dialogue is fruitful and will have far-reaching effects on future cooperation.

Bologna, the home town of the first university of the Western world, will remember that here, a group of visionary people from the East and the West opened the windows for exchanges between different cultures and medicines, and established a non-governmental, non-political, and non-profit 'Dialogue on Human Health between TCM Culture and Western Medicine', a permanent global mechanism.

In future, this dialogue will attract more international institutions and organizations, societies, and renowned figures to join. The permanent goal of the dialogue is to integrate TCM and Western medicine cultures and to improve human health.

By signing this declaration we commit to work for the development of friendship between West and East and to contribute to the integration of TCM culture and Western medicine in the next years, for the well-being of mankind.

Disclosure Statement

The author has no conflicts of interest.

References

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