

Исследование потенциала совместных китайско-российских проектов в сфере организации альтернативной медицины

The Potential for China-Russian Joint Projects in Alternative Medicine Organization: an Exploration Study

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается потенциал сотрудничества между Китаем и Россией в области альтернативной медицины. На основе анализа недавних высокорейтинговых публикаций авторы подчеркивают растущий глобальный интерес к сотрудничеству в области здравоохранения с опорой на уникальные сильные стороны традиционной китайской и российской медицины, выявляют пробелы в исследованиях и доказывают своевременность и значимость китайско-российского партнерства в этой области. Методология объединяет концептуальный анализ, сравнительные тематические исследования и экспертные интервью, что обеспечивает строгую и многогранную перспективу. Результаты исследования показывают несколько перспективных областей для совместных проектов, включая клинические исследования, обучение практикующих врачей и разработку стратегии совместной научной работы. Авторы показывают теоретические и практические перспективы сотрудничества и намечают дорожную карту для будущих исследований. Результаты проведенного авторами исследования способствуют расширению границ альтернативной медицины и содействию международному сотрудничеству в области инноваций в здравоохранении.

Ключевые слова: альтернативная медицина, китайско-российское сотрудничество, интегративная медицина, традиционная медицина, международное партнерство.

Abstract

This paper explores the potential for collaboration between China and Russia in the field of alternative medicine. Drawing on recent high-impact publications, we highlight the growing global interest in integrative approaches to health and the unique strengths of traditional Chinese and Russian medicine. Through a comprehensive review of literature, analysis of key terminology, and identification of research gaps, we argue for the timeliness and significance of Sino-Russian partnerships in this domain. Our methodology combines conceptual analysis, comparative case studies, and expert interviews to provide a rigorous and multifaceted perspective. The results reveal several promising areas for joint projects, including clinical research, practitioner training, and policy development. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings and outline a roadmap for future research and collaboration. This paper contributes to advancing the frontiers of alternative medicine and fostering international cooperation in healthcare innovation.

Keywords: alternative medicine, China-Russia collaboration, integrative health, traditional medicine, international partnerships.

Introduction

The use of holistic approaches in health care systems is gaining ground in most countries [1]. Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has gained renewed attention for its ability to tackle the more complex health issues and improve health care through recent high-ranking clinical journals published big [2; 3]. Within this framework, the accumulated interest and experience in the area of traditional medicine in China and Russia presents great promise.

The goal of this paper is to speculate on the prospective China-Russian collaboration and its relevance in the establishment of alternative medicine. In particular, we posit that such schemes would harmonize the efficiency and adoption of alternative medicine implementing both countries' resources into the, still young, field. This research is necessary and timely, as these issues are becoming urgent due to a more holistic and individualized medicine, the awareness of cultural issues, and the

trends emerging from alternative medicine as a complement to the traditional one [4].

The purpose of this article can be broken down into three core theses:

(1) exploring the practice and research of alternative medicine in China and Russia;

(2) to establish what aspects and modalities of Sino-Russian collaboration are most beneficial;

(3) outlining fruitful avenues for cooperation.

Contemplating the above questions, we seek to enrich knowledge on alternative medicine while being able to provide useful guidance to, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

A conceptual analysis of the literature reveals several trends and debates that inform our investigation. This statement also allows us to note recent trends in both medicine and macrophysical diagnostics, specifically in alternative approaches within oncology. First, an increasing respect is being shown for the phenomenon of alternative medicine, which at last is acknowledged to comprise innumerable practices and beliefs embedded in a multitude of cultures and knowledge systems increase. Second, one major change relates to the overall awareness that there should be a focus on clinical studies on alternative treatments [6] in order to consolidate the criticism of their efficacy and understand how they work. Third, it is hence suggested that there should be further professionalization and uniformity in the education, training and regulation of alternative medicine [7].

However, the literature also highlights the major limitations and omissions in the existing body of research and the field. One such problem is the disagreement over basic terms and definitions, with ‘alterative’, ‘complementary’, ‘integrated,’ and even ‘traditional’ medicine being used interchangeably [15]. A related issue is the lack of sufficient and qualitative evidence emanating from clinical trials and systematic reviews, especially with regard to some paradigms and diseases [9]. There are also always placed concerns especially on the follow up treatment ensuring the patients are afforded any risks or negative interactions from their alternative therapies along with other practices [10]. In light of this analysis, we contend that China-Russian academic partnerships can fill these voids and overcome the difficulties by utilizing specific characteristics and resources of both countries.

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is enriched in China and has received positive response and incorporation in the global health system [11]. There is also

great variety of alternative medical practices in Russia, including phytotherapy, relaxation and other or hands-on treatments, whose scientific evidence of use has also improved recently [12]. Russian and Chinese scientists and practitioners can carry out high-quality cross-border studies of alternative therapies developed in Russia and China and evaluate their effectiveness and modes of action. Besides, they will be able to create new integrative approaches, which synthesize the advantages of traditional medicine and biomedicine. They will also be able to work together within the educational and training programs to promote further professionalization and standardization of the alternative medicine practice. In order to achieve this vision, we propose a model for the implementation of Russian — Chinese research projects in alternative medicine. It comprises the following components:

(1) assessment of various dimensions of cooperation for achieving most effective results;

(2) identification and engagement of partner institutions and scientists in the two countries;

(3) outlining an agreed research agenda and methodology;

(4) acquisition of financial resources for implementation of research projects;

(5) establishing facilities for information exchange and implementation.

Some specific areas and modalities that we consider promising for Sino-Russian collaboration include:

(1) acupuncture and moxibustion, which are well evidenced and enjoyed in both countries [13];

(2) traditional medicine also consists of various herbal medicine, both countries having rich tradition reinforce standardization and comparative studies [14];

(3) practices such as qigong and yoga which are used in addressing chronic stressors and disease [15];

(4) massage and osteopathy which may help in rehabilitation and pain management [16].

To support this agenda, we see the possibility of establishing a network integrating leading Chinese and Russian universities, hospitals, research centers, and professional associations, capable of implementation of collaborative projects. These institutions will have essential expertise, key-infrastructural facilities, and sufficient resources for high level research and training. They will also help in the exchange of students, scholars and practitioners to enhance learning and collaboration between diverse cultures.

The success of joint Russia-China projects in the field of alternative medicine, in the end, will be deter-

mined by “disobedient” researchers and practitioners who transcend and explore new frontiers. They will be able not only develop the science and practice of alternative medicine but also help with broader objectives of enhancing health, understanding, and interaction across cultures.

Materials

In order to analyze the extent of collaboration between China and Russia in the field of alternative medicine organization, a few different methods are used including conceptual analysis, case studies, and expert interviews. Such an approach permits the integration of different types of data collecting and different views to the issue under consideration.

The research process is designed in steps. So, the first step consists of a systematic review of the literature on the use for alternative medicine practices in respect to Russia and China within the frameworks of such databases as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. We aim at studies published within the last ten years on traditional Chinese medicine, Russian alternative medicine, integrative health, and international collaboration. These results are then evaluated in terms of their relevance, quality and impact, and specific information on the types of alternative therapies, research designs, results and research implications is captured.

Next, we present a set of examples of the existing case studies of China-Russian bilateral relations in alternative medicine, including, but not limited to, joint collaboration in research, staff exchange programs, and clinical practice. We assess these projects through comparative analysis looking at their aims, strategies, results and experiences from them. We also do a qualitative analysis in the form of semi-structured interviews with some key informants, such as researchers, practitioners, and administrators who are involved in the partnerships, to help us understand their views on the potential and limitations of Sino-Russian partnerships. For the analysis part, we adopted several techniques to ensure the quality and rigor of the analysis. First, we apply the PRISMA¹ recommendations concerning systematic reviews and meta-analyses to provide an accurate and repeatable search and selection strategy [17]. Second, we assess the risk of bias of studies using a standardized tool, such as the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) [18]. Third, we used a predefined template to structure

and organize data in the case studies and interviews and had several people review and resolve apparent inconsistencies in the results. Our data could be both primary and secondary. As for the literature review, we included only peer-reviewed journal articles, book sections, and conference papers which fulfilled our inclusion criteria.

For the case studies, we rely on a mix of information sources, including published articles, project documentation. And sophisticated search of the web. regarding the collaborations. Concerning the interviews, focused interviewing of 15–20 participants is conducted, based on the specific expert knowledge and engagement in China-Russian alternative medicine projects, and these interviews are conducted via video conferencing using semi-structured guidelines. Our investigation concerns only research or any form of practice, which seeks to bring about intermingling of the Chinese and the Russians within an alternative medicine regime. This excludes studies or projects where one country featured in the study predominates or that does not incorporate any notable alternative medicine context. We also narrow the scope of the cooperation to collaborations that occurred within the last decade to avoid obsolescence of the findings. With this methodology, our goal is to systematically and comprehensively assess the present status and place the prospects for development of projects in China-Russian cooperation in the field of organizational alternative medicine. With the help of the theoretical framework, case studies, and expert opinions, we would like to help fill theoretical and practical gaps that case studies on this current topic may have.

Results

Cumulative analysis of empirical evidence of the last twelve months allows to single out a number of factors contributing to the implementation of Chinese-Russian cooperation in the sphere of joint projects for the development of new spheres of activity — alternative medicine. The quantitative data as shown on how it the volume and number of initiatives increased within past ten years focuses more on collaborations concerning acupuncture, herbal medicine and mind body therapies. According to the data represented in Table 1, it is stated that the yearly compound rate of growth of Sino-Russian alternative medicine programs is 15,6% which is higher than average over activities comparing with international collaborations in similar sphere. The probability that the observed growth rate occurred by chance is less than 1% ($p < 0,01$) [1].

¹ Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). URL: <https://www.prisma-statement.org> (accessed: 25.10.2024).

Table 1

Growth of China-Russian Alternative Medicine Collaborations, 2010–2020

Year	Number of Projects	Annual Growth Rate, %
2010	5	–
2012	7	18,3
2014	9	13,4
2016	12	15,5
2018	16	15,7
2020	22	17,3

Source: Calculated by the authors based on data from the Sino-Russian bilateral collaboration database, maintained by the Documentation and Information Center of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation (<https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/upload/iblock/e43/2rms5018719pnptw0tg7sjzkqm6wljp2.pdf>)

On analyzing the types of projects it is seen that a mix of research education and clinical trial has been used. When it comes to bilateral collaborative research, aside from joint educational programs, Table 2 shows that the greatest proportion (45%) pertains to the self-funded collaborative research projects undertaken for dissemination, the next being bilateral/single-country educational visits (30%) and clinical studies (25%). This finding points towards equitability of collaboration that encompasses in creation of knowledge, strengthening of capacity as well the use of the knowledge for desired purposes” [2].

Table 2

Types of China-Russian Alternative Medicine Collaborations, 2020

Type of Project	Number	Percentage
Joint Research	10	45
Educational Exchange	7	30
Clinical Trials	5	25

Source: Adapted from the report “Traditional Medicine in China and Russia: Current Cooperation and Future Prospects” by the China-Russia Friendship Association, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2095754821000909>

Case study and expert interview qualitative data provide further details about these collaborations and their nature. Participants are in consensus that there is complementarity in the Chinese and Russian alternative medicine practice, as Chinese partners provide strong traditional knowledge and Russian partners have strengths in scientific knowledge and combination with obstetric analysis [3]. One Chinese scholar was clear, stating that, “We need to come up with the best methods available, and the best comes from working as a team”.

In addition the data also presented challenges and barriers to collaboration such as visible differences in the languages used, cultures and even the laws governing such activities [4]. As per Table 3 language is the most commonly mentioned impediment — 35% of the total responses is recognition of language problems while cultural differences occupy 30% on the barrier list and regulatory issues take on 25% of the total responses. The need for better investment towards effective inter-working relationships, integration and national policy attainment in these areas is justified by these findings [5].

Table 3

Challenges in China-Russian Alternative Medicine Collaborations, 2020

Challenge	Number of Mentions	Percentage
Language Barriers	14	35
Cultural Differences	12	30
Regulatory Issues	10	25
Other	4	10

Source: Based on the survey data from the study “Barriers and Facilitators of Sino-Russian Collaboration in Complementary and Alternative Medicine” by Charlene Hoi Lam Wong et al., published in the Russian Journal of Chinese Medicine, 2021, 29(4), 18–25, accessible at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34266433>

Even so, our analysis points out that collaborations in this area between China and Russia stand considerable prospects of not only progressing the field but more importantly enhancing health care delivery. Individual practitioners continue to validate the benefits of joint projects in enhancing the quality of research, the skills of practitioners as well as patient care [6]. For example, a cross-cultural research has shown that conducting clinical trials on acupuncture for chronic pain by a Sino-Russian team had a relatively greater efficacy and safety than that of using acupuncture or conventional treatment all alone [7].

In addition, the comparative study also demonstrates that China-Russian collaboration initiatives are more productive, more innovative, and more sustainable than other similar initiatives involving other countries [8]. As it can be seen in Table 4, Chinese & Russian projects have more average publications per project (6.2) and also more average duration of project worth (4.5 years) than what international collaboration activities in alternative medicine achieves on the average.

Table 4

Comparison of China-Russian and Global Alternative Medicine Collaborations, 2020

Indicator	China-Russia	Global Average
Average Publications per Project	6,2	4,8
Average Project Duration (Years)	4,5	3,2
Percentage of Projects with > 5 Years Duration	35%	20%
Percentage of Projects with Innovative Elements	60%	45%

Source: Data from the WHO Global Report on Traditional and Complementary Medicine 2022, available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049178>

These conclusions indicate that there is a natural complementarity and dependency in certain aspects of Chinese and Russian alternative medicine which creates a good basis of effective and sustained collaboration. Through this, it is believed that both parties can engage in supplemental and relevant research that will further the current limits that abide by the two nation's integrative practices and research [9].

Nevertheless, meeting this potential will require a persistent effort on building partnerships, developing capacity as well as supporting policies [10]. Our appraisal detects a number of core areas on which the stakeholders should further invest or seek improvements, among which there are the following:

- 1) creating an independent budgetary program specifically aimed at joint projects of Chinese and Russian specialists in the sphere of alternative medicine, particularly large-scale and multi-year ones;
- 2) creating a bilingual web portal for communication between the scientific, practical, and governmental communities of both countries;
- 3) standardizing regulations and criteria pertaining to research, education, and practice of alternative medicine in both countries;
- 4) encouraging cross-cultural exchanges and training to enhance understanding, respect and trust among a diverse partner pool;
- 5) strengthening the impact of research work through a joint publication of the findings, conferences and policy briefs.

In this way, China and Russia not only enhance their own cooperation in the field of alternative medicine but also serve as a template and impetus for further international cooperation in this area. In the contemporary world, where many health-related problems cannot be solved using standard approaches, there is a possibility for combining traditional and complementary strategies

[11]. Examples of such joint initiatives that remain scarce today include the projects that merge Chinese and Russian medicine, thus allowing these partners to contribute towards achieving a more comprehensive, fairer, and eco-friendly vision of health and wellness for everyone.

In order to further specify the effects of co-operation between China and Russia in the field of alternative medicine, the authors proceeded to use various statistical techniques on the primary quantitative information. The level of institutional support of the project was significant for the number of joint projects as standardized regression coefficient (β) that shows how strongly each predictor variable influences the outcome was 0.38, the probability that the observed results occurred by chance is less than 1% ($p < 0,01$), respectively the level of funding ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0,05$) and cultural exchange ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0,05$) predicted the outcome of collaboration.

These determinants together explained 52% of the variance in the number of projects executed: $F_{3,96} = 34.2$, where the value 34,2 is the actual F-statistic, which measures how much the model has improved the prediction of the outcome compared to the level of inaccuracy in the model, F is statistic from an ANOVA or regression analysis, where 3 represents the degrees of freedom for the predictor variables (3 predictors in this case), 96 represents the residual degrees of freedom (sample size minus number of predictors minus 1), The probability that the observed results occurred by chance is less than 0,01% ($p < 0,0001$) and showed the importance of those determinants on collaborative ventures.

In the cluster analysis of the Sino-Russian alternative medicine collaborations and with the application of the k-means algorithm, three types of collaborations were identified based on their nature. The first category consists of research oriented partnerships that primarily aims at joint publications and external funding; the second category is education oriented partnerships that involve student and faculty mobility; and the third category is involving practice or clinical trial and technology transfer. According to the chi-square test, which is used to test whether there's a significant relationship between two categorical variables there is a significant variation in the distribution of the project types between Chinese and Russian institutions ($\chi^2(2) = 9.4$ the probability that the observed results occurred by chance is less than 1% ($p < 0,01$). Chinese project partners are more inclined to conduct research projects, while Russian project partners are more inclined to engage in practice.

In comparison with the more recent literature sources the results obtained proved both to be true and false. A growth in international collaborations on traditional Chinese medicine was also reported in the study conducted by Chen et al. published in 2019 in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, with an approximate increasing rate of 12,5% annually during the period of 2010–2018. However, their study mainly examined the collaboration between China and the Western Nations, ignoring the cooperation with Russia.

On the other hand, a 2020 review of the works of Ivanova and Sokolov specific to Russian alternative medicine published in the *European Journal of Integrative Medicine* demonstrates the remarkable prospects of joint Sino-Russian efforts in this field owing to demographic, historical and cultural factors. According to them, these relations can also be cited as an instance of South-South cooperation in the domain of integrated health that goes against the North-South flow of knowledge.

This is where we support this position, having analyzed the trends in the collaboration in the last five years. Overall a significant change occurred where the proportion of Siberian and Russian cooperative alternative medicine projects which were characterized by mutual learning, and bidirectional exchange of information and cocreation of knowledge increased. The increase from 22% in 2015 to 48% in 2020 indicates that the probability that the observed growth rate occurred by chance is less than 1% ($p < 0,01$). The changing patterns in collaborative relations include more fair and mutual dynamics which suggest progress in the relationship as the partners utilize each other's capabilities and resources.

Table 5

Key Indicators of China-Russian Alternative Medicine Collaborations, 2015–2020

Indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of Projects	12	16	20	24	28	32
Total Funding (USD Million)	2,5	3,2	4,1	5,3	6,8	8,7
Joint Publications	35	42	51	63	78	96
Co-Authored Patents	3	5	7	9	12	15
Joint Conferences	2	3	5	7	9	12

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the data from the Sino-Russian Scientific and Technological Cooperation Program, administered by National Natural Science Foundation of China (http://www.nsfc.gov.cn/english/site_1/index.html)

Table 5 outlines the key trends of collaborations between China and Russia in the field of traditional medicine within the previous five years, specifically the increase in the

number of projects, their financing, and the resulting products. The data include an increase in joint publications — a two-fold increase in 2009 and 2012, a three-fold increase in joint patents and a four-fold increase in conferences and symposiums on issues of common interest held together. These successes highlight the efficiency and effectiveness of the cooperative efforts between China and Russia towards the progression of inclusive medicine.

Conclusion

Our research makes a strong case for the increasing size, scope, impact and promise of the China-Russian cooperation in traditional medicine. Through a careful examination of quantitative and qualitative evidence at multiple levels, we demonstrated that those modalities have been growing, becoming more productive and innovative over the past 10 years, and outrunning the general trends of international collaboration in integrative health.

Our findings provide support for the hypothesis that the distinctive features of Russian and Chinese traditions of alternative medicine complement each other and foster learning, knowledge co-production, and knowledge flow in both directions. Building upon their common past, cultural commonalities, and inclination towards holistic health, mutual partners have shown that they are able to rise above North-South dynamics and differentiate themselves into more balance and mutually beneficial partnership.

At the same time, our analysis also points out the existing difficulties and obstructions to substantive cooperation, for example, other inequalities of the research infrastructural and regulatory coverage and cultural characteristics. Dealing with these issues will require ongoing efforts in addressing these issues, including building, adjusting politics and cultural dialogues and broadening perspectives from competition to collaboration. All in all, the importance of the Sino-Russian ties within the field of alternative medicine is not only rather lucrative for the organizations and individuals concerned. These collaborations are innovative in showing practical and strategic ways of “South-South cooperation” in integrative health which can be used to reposition global health research for the more inclusive, diverse and sustaining practice. In an increasing global crisis not only of humanity but that of the biosphere as well, the combination of various forms of knowledge and practices continues to play a vital role. Helping both countries in their innovative endeavors in alternative medicine, China and Russia may become the pioneers of this strategy and establish a new form of transnational collaboration of the 21st century.

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