

The Integration of Entertainment and Education: An Exploration of the Narrative Rhetoric of TCM Knowledge Dissemination in Legend of Zhen Huan

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Abstract. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) represents a profound repository of ancient wisdom, encompassing unique philosophical frameworks, diagnostic methodologies, and health-preserving practices. However, its inherent complexity-rooted in abstract concepts and specialized principles-and cultural distinctiveness have long hindered its widespread accessibility to the general public. In the context of knowledge dissemination, film and television works have emerged as pivotal carriers, leveraging audio-visual storytelling to transform esoteric professional content into intuitive, engaging narratives. Among such works, the TV drama Legend of Zhen Huan has achieved remarkable success in popularizing TCM knowledge: by seamlessly integrating medicinal properties, dietary health preservation, and TCM therapies into its plotlines, it has made complex TCM concepts perceptible and memorable to a broad audience, setting a notable example for the public communication of specialized medical knowledge. Given the growing significance of media in shaping public understanding of traditional health systems, exploring how the drama achieves accessible TCM dissemination through narrative strategies holds substantial value for both cultural communication and health education research.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); Knowledge dissemination; Legend of Zhen Huan; Narrative rhetoric; Edutainment.

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) stands as a profound repository of ancient wisdom, weaving together unique philosophical frameworks, syndrome-differentiated diagnostic methodologies, and nature-based health-preserving practices that have shaped China's cultural heritage for millennia. Yet TCM faces a persistent paradox: its principles of holistic balance and preventive health remain deeply relevant to contemporary audiences, but its abstract core concepts - such as qi (vital energy), meridians (energy channels), and Yin-Yang harmony-and specialized terminology have long alienated the general public, confining its reach to professional textbooks, clinical settings, and niche scholarly circles. This gap between TCM's cultural and practical value and its public accessibility has become a critical challenge in traditional knowledge dissemination.

In an era where audio-visual media dominates knowledge sharing, film and television have emerged as transformative bridges between esoteric expertise and public understanding. Unlike academic papers or technical manuals, media narratives leverage storytelling to reimagine complex content as intuitive, emotionally resonant experiences-shifting the conversation from "what is TCM? " to "how does TCM shape lives? " [1]. No work exemplifies this transformative potential better than the Qing Dynasty imperial harem drama Legend of Zhen Huan. Beyond its acclaim as a gripping tale of power, loyalty, and intrigue, the series has quietly established itself as a powerful cultural medium for TCM dissemination: it weaves the reproductive risks of musk into plot twists, frames the blood-nourishing properties of Dong 'e donkey-hide gelatin as part of daily imperial wellness routines, uses moxibustion scenes to illustrate prenatal care logic, and embeds medicinal diets within palace life - rendering once esoteric concepts familiar and memorable to a global audience.

This study centers on unpacking the success of Legend of Zhen Huan in TCM knowledge dissemination, with a central thesis: the drama employs five interrelated narrative rhetorical strategies - narrative repetition, concretization, visualization, simplification, and selective narration-to

"deprofessionalize " TCM knowledge. By embedding TCM concepts in relatable imperial life scenarios (e.g., palace dietary rituals, skincare routines, maternal health crises), prioritizing practical utility over abstract theory, and aligning knowledge with character fates, these strategies lower the public's cognitive threshold for understanding TCM, enhance knowledge retention, and ultimately achieve the " edutainment " effect (the integration of education and entertainment) critical to effective public communication of specialized fields.

To explore this thesis, the study proceeds in structured sections. First, this introduction establishes the research's relevance by situating TCM's communication challenges within broader debates about traditional knowledge dissemination. Second, the literature review synthesizes existing scholarship on narrative rhetoric in media, the role of film and television in health communication, and the unique barriers to TCM dissemination-identifying critical gaps that this study aims to address. Third, the research question is explicitly posed to guide the subsequent analysis. Fourth, the historical and cultural context section grounds the drama's TCM representations in TCM's status as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage and the role of modern media in reviving traditional culture. Fifth, the textual analysis dissects each of the five narrative strategies using key plot examples. Finally, the conclusion summarizes findings, discusses limitations (e.g., the need for audience reception data), and offers implications for future traditional medical knowledge dissemination via media.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Narrative Rhetoric in Media Communication

Narrative rhetoric serves as a foundational framework for disseminating complex information to mass audiences, with its core strategies directly shaping the perception and retention of knowledge.

Narrative repetition refers to the differentiated retelling of thematic content within a broader narrative, which reinforces audience memory and knowledge authority by centering attention on key messages through iterative yet distinct scenarios [2]. This aligns with the core tenets of Cultivation Theory, which posits that repeated exposure to media representations shapes audiences' perceptions of reality-particularly for specialized fields such as medicine [3]. Narrative concretization transforms abstract concepts into perceptible plotlines, linking theoretical knowledge to observable character experiences and eliminating ambiguity [4].

Meanwhile, narrative visualization integrates plot logic with visual elements (e.g., props, scenes, character behaviors) to strike a balance between professional rigor and audience cognitive adaptability (Segel and Heer [5], 2010).

Complementary to these strategies are narrative simplification and selective narration: the former reduces cognitive load for non-expert audiences by stripping away redundant professional details while preserving core information [6]; the latter prioritizes content relevant to audience needs, embedding specialized knowledge within relatable contexts [7]. Collectively, these rhetorical approaches address a core challenge in knowledge communication - translating esoteric content into engaging, memorable narratives that transcend professional boundaries.

2.2. Dissemination of Health and Medical Knowledge in Film and Television

Film and television have emerged as pivotal vehicles for disseminating health and medical knowledge, leveraging their entertainment value to bridge the gap between professional expertise and public understanding. Research in health communication emphasizes that medical narratives in media render abstract health knowledge tangible through concrete plot developments-such as linking medicinal properties to character outcomes [1]. Particularly in entertainment media, emotional connection mitigates the rigidity of knowledge dissemination, as audiences ' immersion in character fates enhances their acceptance of embedded medical content [9].

For traditional medical systems, the role of media is especially critical: studies indicate that medical dramas often reinforce the authority of traditional medical knowledge through plot recurrence and character consequences [8]. Additionally, narrative transportation - audience immersion in storylines - suppresses critical questioning of simplified medical logic, enabling non-expert audiences to grasp core concepts more easily [10]. However, existing research also highlights inherent risks: narrative fabrication or over-simplification may lead to public misunderstandings of medical principles [11], underscoring the need to balance accessibility with factual accuracy.

2.3. Traditional Medical Knowledge Communication and Cross-Cultural Contexts

The media dissemination of traditional medical knowledge-such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)-faces unique challenges due to its cultural specificity and abstract conceptual frameworks (e.g., "qi qi, ""meridians meridians and acupoints, "and"syntax differentiation syndrome differentiation"). Scholars argue that effective communication of traditional medicine requires "deprofessionalization " strategies, transforming complex theories into practical, contextually relevant content [12]. Media narratives achieve this by embedding traditional medical practices within daily-life scenarios (e.g., dietary health preservation, skincare, prenatal care) - familiarity with these settings strengthens audience resonance and knowledge retention [26].

Cross-cultural communication research further notes that media dissemination of traditional medical knowledge must address cultural differences in medical worldviews, leveraging narrative universals (e.g., character conflicts, cause-effect plotlines) to transcend cultural barriers [13]. However, existing studies predominantly focus on Western medical dramas or macro cultural communication frameworks, lacking systematic analysis of how specific narrative strategies synergize to disseminate TCM-a time-honored and culturally embedded medical system- through popular media. This research gap leaves unanswered the critical question of how to balance the professional complexity of TCM with public accessibility in narrative contexts.

2.4. TCM Representation in Film and Television

Existing research on TCM representation in media acknowledges its value as a cultural communication tool, with documentaries and dramas playing key roles in popularizing TCM concepts (e.g., " the homology of medicine and food, " herbal properties). Nevertheless, TCM-related media content often faces criticisms, such as exaggerated efficacy, fabricated medicinal interactions, or superficial treatment of core principles - issues that risk misleading audiences and undermining TCM's credibility [14]. Despite these challenges, successful cases like Legend of Zhen Huan demonstrate that integrating TCM into engaging narratives can effectively disseminate its practical wisdom, suggesting that intentionally designed narrative rhetorical strategies may resolve the tension between accessibility and accuracy. However, few studies have systematically identified and analyzed these strategies, leaving a critical gap in understanding how media narratives can responsibly and effectively popularize TCM knowledge.

3. Traditional Cultural Context: TCM as Cultural Heritage and Communication Challenges

In the academic context, TCM is recognized as a knowledge system with cultural and historical significance. Its patrimonialisation reflects unique cultural and institutional challenges [15]. Acupuncture and moxibustion, on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, raise visibility but expose issues like disrupted knowledge transmission and scientific modernization pressures. Obringer [15] sees heritage status as a defensive response. TCM's theoretical structures, such as Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, mirror ancient cognitive patterns similar to pre-Christian European health beliefs [16], highlighting its value as clinical practice and cross-civilizational legacy.

TCM's complexity poses challenges for public understanding [17]. Its holistic diagnoses and treatments emphasize interactions among individuals, environment, emotions, and lifestyle. In Western biomedical contexts, abstract concepts are often simplified; for example, Zen acupuncture

retains procedures but omits theory. The worldview gap between TCM and biomedicine makes integration both a technical and philosophical challenge, reinforcing professional barriers and cognitive gaps.

Rising global health anxiety has increased demand for accessible health knowledge [18]. Visual narratives, such as photo stories, enhance clarity and engagement even for audiences with limited health literacy [19]. This allows media, including TV dramas, to convey complex TCM knowledge through concrete scenarios, narratives, and visuals, making it more accessible and applicable, and supporting cross-cultural health communication.

4. Media Context: Film/TV as Modern Vehicles for Traditional Cultural Transmission

Research shows that film and television can recontextualize complex cultural knowledge for broader audiences. Chambers [20] finds that folk cinema uses community participation to visualize and narrativize oral culture and local traditions while preserving cultural authority. Gledhill [21] emphasizes that transnational films leverage narrative and locality to create spaces for cultural understanding, letting audiences engage with foreign cultures through sensory and contextual experiences. These studies suggest that audiovisual media serve not only as entertainment but also as modern vehicles for transmitting traditional cultural knowledge, making complex heritage more accessible.

Since 2010, Chinese historical dramas have been discussed in film studies not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for cultural transmission. Scholars note that these dramas have moved beyond simple historical narration to become heritage media and tools for cross-cultural translation. In the 2010s, domestic historical dramas shifted from storytelling to cultural concretization. Through carefully designed sets, costumes, props, ritualized behaviors, and detailed depictions of court life, they visualize complex cultural knowledge such as cuisine, etiquette, and medicine, making abstract traditions tangible. This approach enhances audience immersion and provides a practical way to transmit traditional culture through contemporary media.

Legend of Zhen Huan, set in the Qing dynasty during Emperor Yongzheng's reign, depicts highly developed imperial medical systems. The Imperial Medical Institute followed standardized procedures, with established dietary therapy and diagnostic protocols, providing a solid basis for embedding TCM knowledge. The production's attention to costumes, props, medical instruments, herbs, and medicinal cuisine closely reflects historical reality. Scenes of pulse diagnosis, prescription preparation, medicinal food, poison administration, and TCM logic offer tangible experiences, helping audiences grasp abstract medical knowledge. Thus, Legend of Zhen Huan combines rich content and historical accuracy, making it an ideal case for studying how TCM knowledge is communicated through audiovisual rhetoric.

5. Contemporary Media Environment and Rhetorical Situation

Digital platforms have extended the lifespan of legacy TV dramas and expanded audiences' interpretive space. Series like Legend of Zhen Huan reach new viewers via streaming, social media, and short videos, forming new interpretive communities [22]. Participatory culture [23] allows audiences not only to consume content but also to create and share it—for example, through memes, video edits, or commentary—effectively recontextualizing cultural texts.

Algorithmic amplification increases the visibility of such content, allowing visually or emotionally striking segments to circulate widely [22, 24]. Research shows that algorithmic visibility depends more on account attributes, technical tags, and presentation style than on thematic content, with emotionally intense or visually striking clips favored for promotion [22, 24].

TCM-related scenes in Legend of Zhen Huan are well-suited for this type of re-encoding. Scenes such as pulse diagnosis, medicinal cuisine preparation, and poison administration are visually striking, follow clear causal narratives from symptoms to diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes, and carry strong

emotional intensity. These elements help audiences understand TCM knowledge through visual, narrative, and emotional engagement, enhancing both comprehension and retention, and directly supporting the research focus on how the series communicates TCM knowledge to a wider public.

6. Research Question

What narrative strategies allow Legend of Zhen Huan to translate TCM's complexity into accessible storytelling, and how might these strategies serve as a model for disseminating traditional medical knowledge more broadly?

7. Methodology

Prior studies have established narrative rhetoric (repetition, concretization, etc.) as a pivotal tool for disseminating complex knowledge via media, recognized film/TV's role in bridging professional medical expertise and public understanding, and noted TCM's communication challenges due to cultural specificity and abstract concepts-while identifying a gap in systematic analysis of how specific narrative strategies synergize to popularize TCM through mainstream dramas. Against the backdrop of TCM's status as a cultural heritage facing dissemination barriers and growing public demand for accessible health knowledge, TV dramas like Legend of Zhen Huan have emerged as effective vehicles for translating TCM into relatable content, amplified by contemporary digital media's reach. Building on this foundation, this study adopts a qualitative research approach centered on textual analysis to explore the drama's TCM dissemination strategies, with detailed justification and application as follows:

7.1. Why Qualitative Textual Analysis Is the Most Appropriate Method

Qualitative textual analysis is uniquely suited to this research for three core reasons. First, it aligns with the study's exploratory goal of unpacking contextualized narrative strategies: TCM knowledge in Legend of Zhen Huan is not explicitly presented as educational content but woven into plot conflicts, character interactions, and daily imperial scenarios. Qualitative analysis prioritizes depth over breadth, enabling the excavation of subtle rhetorical choices-such as how medicinal properties are linked to character fates or how TCM practices are visualized through props and scenes-that quantitative methods (e.g., content analysis) might oversimplify or overlook. Second, it supports the examination of strategy synergy: the drama's five narrative rhetorical strategies (repetition, concretization, visualization, simplification, selective narration) operate interdependently to "deprofessionalize" TCM. Qualitative textual analysis allows for holistic interpretation of how these strategies interact within specific plot segments, capturing the nuanced ways they collectively shape audience understanding of TCM. Third, it accommodates the cultural and contextual richness of TCM: as a knowledge system deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy and daily life, TCM's dissemination cannot be separated from the drama's historical setting, character dynamics, and cultural cues. Qualitative analysis enables the integration of these contextual elements, ensuring that the interpretation of narrative strategies is grounded in the drama's cultural and narrative framework-rather than reducing complex knowledge to isolated variables. This aligns with Dahlstrom's [12] argument that qualitative methods are critical for communicating traditional knowledge, as they preserve the "contextual integrity" necessary for meaningful analysis.

7.2. How Qualitative Textual Analysis Will Be Applied to the Text

The application of qualitative textual analysis will follow three targeted, iterative steps. First, purposeful sampling of TCM-related plot segments: identify key scenes from Legend of Zhen Huan that embed TCM knowledge, including those involving medicinal materials (e.g., musk, Dong'e donkey-hide gelatin), TCM therapies (e.g., moxibustion, dietary therapy), and health preservation practices (e.g., herbal skincare, prenatal care). These segments are selected for their direct relevance to the research's focus on narrative strategies and TCM dissemination, ensuring coverage of all five

rhetorical approaches. Second, coding and thematic analysis: for each selected segment, conduct open coding to document manifestations of the five narrative strategies (e.g., repetition of musk's toxicity across multiple character arcs, concretization of bitter apricot seed poisoning through symptom progression). Coding will integrate both textual elements (dialogue, plot development) and visual cues (props, scene composition, character behaviors), with iterative refinement to ensure consistency with core TCM theories (e.g., "medicine and food homology," syndrome differentiation) and narrative rhetoric frameworks from the literature. Third, interpretation and validation: analyze coded data to identify patterns in how the five strategies work together to simplify TCM complexity while retaining core validity. This involves cross-referencing findings with prior scholarship on health communication and traditional knowledge dissemination [1, 8] to validate interpretations and ensure that conclusions about TCM accessibility are grounded in both textual evidence and theoretical rigor. Throughout the process, the qualitative approach emphasizes reflexivity, with ongoing critical examination of how the researcher's understanding of TCM and narrative rhetoric shapes the analysis-strengthening the trustworthiness of findings.

8. Textual Analysis

Legend of Zhen Huan centers on the power struggles in the imperial harem of the Qing Dynasty, ingeniously integrating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) knowledge into its plot. The application of narrative rhetorical devices not only strengthens the rationality of plot conflicts but also realizes the popularization of TCM knowledge. As Furman and Clayton [8] noted in their research on medical dramas, film and television works can make abstract medical knowledge perceptible to audiences through concrete plots-and the dissemination of TCM knowledge in Legend of Zhen Huan is a typical example of this view. The following analysis is based on specific plot details.

8.1. Narrative Repetition: Enhancing Memory and Authority of TCM Knowledge

Narrative repetition refers to the process where a story is recalled and retold within another narrative, generating multiple dualities such as control or resistance, differentiation or integration, and stability/change. This dynamic transformation of story meaning over time, while repeatedly focusing on core information to deepen audience cognition [2], is not a simple duplication of content. Instead, it strengthens key knowledge through differentiated interpretations of similar plots, helping audiences form stable perceptions.

In Legend of Zhen Huan, narrative repetition disseminates core TCM knowledge by repeatedly depicting TCM-related plots, focusing on the efficacy or risks of specific medicinal materials to form a memory-enhancing effect, while verifying the practicality of TCM theories through plot logic. Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that audiences who extensively engage with fictional media content tend to perceive fictional representations of complex themes as reality [8]. The repeated TCM-related plots in Legend of Zhen Huan deepen audiences' understanding of TCM knowledge through this cultivation effect.

8.1.1. Repetitive Narration of Musk Risks to Pregnancy and Childbirth, Highlighting Medicinal Taboos

The drama repeatedly reinforces the TCM knowledge that "musk has a strong penetrating property and is forbidden for pregnant women or long-term use as it endangers pregnancy" through three plots centered on "musk-induced harm to Consort Hua long-term" used the emperor's exclusive "Huan Yi Xiang" (Joyful Fragrance), which secretly contained musk (a TCM medicinal material with pungent and warm properties). Though the fragrance was rich, prolonged exposure to musk invaded her internal organs, leading to lifelong infertility-a key foreshadowing of her tragic fate.



Figure 1. Scene Depicting Huan Yi Xiang Containing Musk in Legend of Zhen Huan. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

When Zhen Huan was first pregnant, she was framed by An Lingrong, who gave her "Scar-Removing Ointment" laced with musk. After long-term application, Zhen Huan suffered abdominal pain and miscarriage. The imperial physician clearly identified that "musk penetrates the skin and disturbs fetal qi (fetal qi, TCM term for the vital energy supporting fetal development)," directly linking the medicinal property to the consequence of miscarriage.



Figure 2. Scene Depicting Scar-Removing Ointment Containing Musk in Legend of Zhen Huan. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

With the empress's support, Noble Lady Qi received a pearl necklace containing musk. Prolonged daily wear allowed musk to act slowly on her body, leaving her unable to conceive. When the truth emerged, the imperial physician disassembled the necklace and identified musk as the culprit, reaffirming its harmful effects.



Figure 3. Scene Depicting Necklace Containing Musk in Legend of Zhen Huan. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

These several plots, set in different scenarios and involving different characters, all point to musk's negative impacts on pregnancy and childbirth. They enable audiences to clearly grasp the core TCM taboo that "musk activates blood circulation, unblocks meridians, and consumes qi (the fundamental vital energy in TCM), making it forbidden for pregnant women." Similar to the repeated presentation of specific medical knowledge in medical dramas, this narrative repetition strengthens memory through "familiarization" [8].

8.1.2. Repetitive Interpretation of Blood-Activating Medicinal Materials Endangering Fetal Stability

The drama conveys the TCM principle that "pregnant women should avoid potent blood-activating medicines" through two conflicts centered on "blood-activating medicinal materials causing unstable fetal vitality".

When Zhen Huan first entered the harem and was pregnant, Consort Qi, instigated by the empress, tried to harm her with pastries containing oleander (a toxic TCM herb with blood-activating effects). Coincidentally, Zhen Huan had drunk cinnamon twig decoction (a TCM formula for warming meridians) that day. Then An Lingrong warned, "Oleander is cold-natured and toxic; cinnamon twig warms and unblocks meridians. Both have blood-moving effects, and concurrent use by pregnant women is likely to cause fetal leakage and miscarriage," clarifying the combined risks of two blood-related medicinal materials.



Figure 4. An Lingrong Warning About the Combined Risks of Oleander and Cinnamon Twig Decoction for Pregnant Women. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

Consort Duan was forced to drink a whole pot of saffron by Consort Hua, not only losing her fetus but also suffering permanent damage to her internal organs and lifelong infertility.



Figure 5. Consort Duan Recalling Being Forced to Drink Saffron, Leading to Permanent Infertility. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

Both oleander and safflower are typical blood-activating medicinal materials in TCM. The two plots - featuring accidental ingestion plus concurrent use of medicine and food and deliberate forced administration - repeatedly confirm the fatal risks of potent blood-activating medicines to the fetal vitality of pregnant women, aligning with the TCM medication norm of "avoiding blood-activating and harsh medicines during pregnancy." This repeated presentation of similar medical risks conforms to the narrative logic of medical dramas that strengthen the authority of medical knowledge through "plot recurrence" [14].

8.1.3. Repeated Presentation of Tonic Medicinal Diets, Popularizing Health Preservation Knowledge

The drama repeatedly features tonic medicinal diet scenes, using daily meals as a carrier to disseminate the TCM common sense of "medicine and food sharing the same origin" (a core TCM concept) and "syndrome-differentiated tonic" (a TCM health preservation principle):

Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin appears repeatedly in Legend of Zhen Huan, embodying its TCM effects such as tonifying blood, nourishing yin, and replenishing qi. Consort Hua drank longan thick soup simmered with Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin daily to regulate qi and blood and nourish her complexion. The Empress once offered the Empress Dowager Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin paste that had been simmered for a long time. Zhen Huan once told the Emperor that she had stewed Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin with Codonopsis root. On another occasion, when asked about replenishing qi and nourishing blood, the Imperial Physician replied that Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin takes effect quickly. Additionally, when Zhen Huan was in poor health, Imperial Physician Wen advised her to eat Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin stewed with lamb. There are many other plots involving Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin (as shown in the figure below).



Figure 6. Imperial Physician Stating That Dong'e Donkey-Hide Gelatin Quickly Replenishes Qi and Nourishes Blood. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

The repetition of multiple tonic scenes allows audiences to intuitively perceive the efficacy of medicinal and edible ingredients like donkey-hide gelatin and Edible Bird's Nest, weakening the

professional barriers of TCM knowledge. This is consistent with the principle of "contextual repetition" promoting knowledge popularization in health communication [25].

8.2. Narrative Concretization: Transforming Abstract TCM Knowledge into Intuitive Plots

Narrative concretization is the process of transforming abstract concepts and theories into perceptible and observable concrete forms. In narrative texts, it is often manifested as binding abstract knowledge to concrete experiences through plots, scenes, or character behaviors, eliminating ambiguity and complexity, and helping audiences understand efficiently [4]. Its core lies in converting "invisible" principles into "visible" plots, endowing abstract information with intuitiveness and perceptibility.

In Legend of Zhen Huan, narrative concretization integrates abstract TCM theories and medicinal properties into observable and perceptible plots through the transformation of "medicinal properties" to "plot consequences" and "medicinal efficacy" to "specific scenes," reducing audience understanding thresholds and realizing the implicit transmission of knowledge. As Sharf and Vanderford [1] emphasized, illness narratives make abstract health knowledge perceptible through concrete plots-and the concretized presentation of TCM knowledge in Legend of Zhen Huan is an application of this narrative strategy.

8.2.1. Concretization of Bitter Apricot Seed Toxicity

In TCM theory, bitter apricot seeds contain amygdalin, which hydrolyzes to produce hydrocyanic acid. A small amount can relieve cough and asthma, but excessive use inhibits cellular respiration and causes poisoning. After falling out of favor and being imprisoned, An Lingrong committed suicide by swallowing a large amount of bitter apricot seeds in despair. The drama concretizes the abstract toxicity of "fatal excessive consumption of bitter apricot seeds" through a complete process: "swallowing difficulty breathing gradual coma eventual death." Meanwhile, the imperial physician's subsequent review noted, "Bitter apricot seeds are slightly toxic; a small amount is harmless to ordinary people, but excessive use poisons the internal organs," further confirming TCM theory and enabling audiences to clearly grasp the dosage taboo of toxic medicinal materials. This way of concretizing medicinal toxicity through character fate aligns with the narrative logic of medical dramas that "verify medical knowledge through plot consequences" [8].



Figure 7. Scene of An Lingrong's Death from Bitter Apricot Seed Poisoning. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.2.2. Concretization of Cassava Flour Stomach-Harming Efficacy

TCM holds that cassava contains cyanogenic glycosides, which are toxic and likely to damage the stomach and cause poisoning if eaten raw or undercooked, but toxicity can be significantly reduced after thorough cooking. To frame Zhen Huan, Consort Hua secretly replaced the horseshoe paste eaten by Princess Wenyi with cassava flour. The princess immediately developed gastrointestinal discomfort symptoms such as vomiting, incessant crying, and listlessness. The imperial physician diagnosed, "The cassava flour is undercooked; its toxicity irritates the spleen and stomach, leading to dysfunction in children's transportation and transformation (a TCM term for digestive function)." The

drama concretizes the toxic consequences of cassava flour harming the stomach through the infant's morbid reactions, and conveys the TCM knowledge that "processing reduces toxicity" (a TCM processing principle) through the detail of "undercooking causing toxicity," grounding the abstract theory of "processing reducing toxicity" in specific plots. This method of transforming medical principles into character symptoms is similar to how medical dramas like Grey's Anatomy concretize medical knowledge through patient symptoms [14].



Figure 8. Imperial Physician Explaining the Toxicity of Undercooked Cassava Flour for Infants.
Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.2.3. Concretization of Scar-Removing Ointment Skin-Nourishing Efficacy

When Zhen Huan was first admitted to the palace, she was scratched by a cat and left with scars on her face. An Lingrong gave her self-made "Shu Hen Jiao" (Scar-Removing Ointment), claiming it contained peach blossom, pearl powder, amber, and other ingredients to fade scars and nourish the skin. The drama concretizes medicinal efficacy through the process of "applying Scar-Removing Ointment scars gradually fading eventual disappearance": TCM holds that peach blossom "activates blood circulation to brighten the skin," pearl powder "moisturizes the skin to fade scars," and amber "promotes skin repair by dispersing blood stasis"-the skin-nourishing effect of the ointment is essentially the combined efficacy of these three herbal ingredients. Through the intuitive change of scar healing, the drama confirms the TCM logic of herbal skin care, allowing audiences to perceive the application value of traditional herbs in skin care. This "efficacy visualization" narrative strategy conforms to the law of "concretized presentation improving knowledge acceptance" in health communication [25].



Figure 9. An Lingrong Introducing the Ingredients of Shu Hen Jiao for Scar Removal and Skin Nourishment. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.3. Narrative Visualization: Integrating Narrative Logic with Visual Presentation

Narrative Visualization refers to a communication approach that integrates narrative logic with visual presentation. By constructing scenarios and materializing details, it transforms abstract information into perceptible content, achieving efficient knowledge transmission through storytelling. Its core lies in balancing the professionalism of information with the cognitive adaptability of audiences, helping specialized knowledge break through barriers to understanding. Segel and Heer [5] point out that this method relies on graphic elements and scene design to balance the creator's narrative intent with the audience's exploration needs, and its unique expressive form exhibits significant adaptability in educational communication and popularization of specialized knowledge.

Legend of Zhen Huan uses palace life narratives as a carrier to implicitly integrate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) knowledge into the plot. Through the display of medicinal materials and props, the presentation of characters' diagnosis and treatment behaviors, and the depiction of changes in health status, it constructs narrative visualization scenarios for TCM knowledge dissemination. By converting abstract medicinal properties, efficacy, and usage taboos into concrete plot content, it lowers the threshold for public understanding and realizes the natural infiltration of knowledge. As Davin [26] notes, medical narratives in film and television media can strengthen audience resonance through the construction of daily-life scenarios and enhance the acceptability of specialized knowledge by relying on plot tension.

Precisely, the drama uses palace intrigue as a link to convey TCM knowledge to the audience's cognition along with the development of the story. Meanwhile, Moyer-Guse [9] proposes that narrative content in entertaining film and television can weaken the rigidity of knowledge dissemination through emotional connection. The drama exactly leverages the emotional resonance generated by the fates and health changes of the consorts, making TCM knowledge more likely to be accepted and remembered by the audience.

First, there is the plot where Zhen Huan presents Noble Lady Qi with undercooked brown rice and coix seed soup to treat her "nightmares."

In the drama, to compete for the Emperor's favor, Noble Lady Qi frequently uses nightmares as an excuse to monopolize his company. To punish her scheme, Zhen Huan ordered servants to send her

undercooked brown rice and coix seed soup, claiming that "brown rice and coix seed soup (brown rice and coix seed soup) can calm the mind, aid sleep, and alleviate nightmares." Under the Emperor's supervision, Noble Lady Qi was forced to drink the unpalatable decoction and dared not use nightmares as a pretense to seek favor afterward. The line design and plot development implicitly convey the knowledge of the homology of medicine and food (medicine-food homology) - "brown rice invigorates the spleen, and coix seeds contain and B vitamins that can assist in sleep"-through a narrative logic that combines "visualization of dietary therapy soup props with punishment intent and plot conflict." Changes in Noble Lady Qi's facial expressions and close-up shots of the brown rice and coix seed soup implicitly convey the taste and flavor of the soup to the audience. This aligns with Dahlstrom [12] view that "scientific knowledge can reduce understanding difficulty through daily-life scenario narratives and adapt to the cognitive habits of non-professional audiences." By constructing a scenario of palace power struggles, the drama allows the audience to perceive the medicinal value of ingredients amid plot tension, realizing the implicit transmission of knowledge.



Figure 10. Servant Delivering Brown Rice and Coix Seed Soup to Noble Lady Qi. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

Second, there is a plot shows An Lingrong used Xiji Wan (Muscle-Reducing Pill) to slim down, resulting in lifelong infertility.

In the drama, to practice ice skating and compete for the Emperor's favor, An resorted to Xiji Wan containing musk. Though the pill quickly endowed her with a slender figure and delicate skin, it ultimately led to permanent infertility. The drama

depicts her body contours after obtaining and taking the Xiji Wan, paired with close-up shots of Zhen Huan delivering the line: "The musk in Xiji Wan severely damages women's bodies and is likely to cause infertility," clearly presenting the risks of the medicinal ingredient.

Centered on the display of beauty props, changes in the character's physical appearance, and the causal narrative linking her actions to the health tragedy, this plot materializes the knowledge that "certain drugs can impair women's fertility" through the twist of the character's fate. It aligns with the research conclusion by Hoffman et al. [13] that "health narratives in film and television must rely on concrete behaviors and scene details to strengthen knowledge relevance and enhance the depth of audience cognition." By leveraging the conflict between the desire for beauty and the health costs incurred, the drama enables the audience to deeply remember the harm musk can inflict on women's bodies.



Figure 11. An Lingrong Choosing Xiji Wan Over Dieting for Quick Slimming. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

Third, there is the plot where Meng Jingxian accidentally ingested soup laced with Arsenic trioxide and died from poisoning.

In the drama, Meng Jingxian mistakenly consumed soup contaminated with Arsenic trioxide. The plot relies on the display of the poisoned soup prop, Meng Jingxian's facial expressions, and physical movements to present a coherent narrative of "accidentally ingesting poisoned food - onset of toxicity - unsuccessful treatment and death." Furthermore, through scene transitions (from the palace dining area to lying down in the bedroom), it intuitively demonstrates the highly toxic nature of Arsenic trioxide, which is reinforced by the imperial physician's diagnostic lines to deepen the audience's understanding of its toxicity.

Constructing a visual narrative through the strong correlation between the scenario of using a highly toxic ingredient and the character's fatal consequence, this plot transforms the core knowledge that Arsenic trioxide is "extremely toxic and untreatable" into a highly impactful plot conflict. It aligns with Gerbner's [3] view that "the dissemination of scientific knowledge in film and television must rely on materialized narrative scenarios and strengthen audience memory through everyday

expressions." Taking the palace dining scene as an entry point, the drama allows the audience to intuitively perceive the hazards of highly toxic medicinal ingredients, enhancing the warning effect and memorability of knowledge dissemination.



Figure 12. Meng Jingxian Showing Symptoms of Arsenic Trioxide Poisoning. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.4. Narrative Simplification: Omitting Mediating Events and Causal Inferences

Narrative simplification is a rhetorical strategy that typically employs ellipsis to systematically and unjustifiably omit key mediating events and causal inferences between an actual sequence of events—such as intervention X and effect Y—while retaining the perceived authenticity of the core information. Its purpose is to construct or achieve a sense that an intervention's impact has already occurred [6].

In Legend of Zhen Huan, narrative simplification operates through the omission of professional logic and the retention of core information, a process which binds TCM knowledge to a narrative function by transforming it into intuitive elements that serve the palace-intrigue plot. The drama does not pursue completeness or rigor in TCM knowledge; instead, it selectively preserves core information such as medicinal functions and basic therapies while omitting professional details such as syndrome differentiation, dosage thresholds, and conditions for efficacy, thus turning TCM knowledge into a tool for driving conflict and shaping characters.

8.4.1. Mugwort for Fetal Stabilization

When An Lingrong experiences fetal restlessness, the imperial physician directly recommends "adding mugwort to the medicine and burning mugwort in the room." Although this presents a generally correct therapy, it systematically omits the most fundamental principle of TCM: syndrome differentiation, which requires that TCM diagnosis be based on the patient's specific constitution to formulate individualized treatment. The series portrays mugwort therapy as a universally applicable solution, without informing the audience that it is only appropriate for pregnant women with "deficiency-cold syndrome."

This simplification, executed by an authoritative figure—the imperial physician—is particularly persuasive. As established in the literature, viewers' identification with and trust in professional roles significantly suppress their inclination to engage in critical questioning [28]. When the physician puts forward the treatment plan with professional authority, viewers tend to accept its surface-level validity rather than investigate the crucial issue of which constitutions it applies to. This universalizing simplification avoids the complex explanation of TCM body constitution types, enabling the "fetal stabilization" plot to proceed quickly. At the same time, through the authoritative role of the physician, it reinforces the narrative of "professional palace medicine," laying the groundwork for the later conflict involving An Lingrong's unstable pregnancy.



Figure 13. Imperial Physician Performing Moxibustion to Stabilize An Lingrong's Fetus. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.4.2. Musk-Induced Infertility

In TCM theory, musk has the functions of promoting blood circulation, inducing menstruation, and triggering labor. Its pharmacological effects depend on complex factors such as route of administration, dosage, and duration of action. The drama, however, presents musk's reproductive toxicity as inevitably activated simply through daily inhalation, ignoring the scientific logic that in reality, the effect requires specific modes of administration (such as oral intake or high-concentration external use) and must meet particular conditions to take effect.

The persuasive force of this simplification is rooted in its strong alignment with narrative transportation [10]. When viewers are immersed in Consort Hua's arrogance, affection, and her tragic arc as a political sacrifice, their cognitive resources are fully captured by the narrative dynamics. At such moments, a complex explanation grounded in real pharmacology would impede comprehension, whereas the simplified logic that "smelling musk causes infertility" greatly reduces cognitive load, making viewers easily persuaded and automatically suppressing deeper questioning of the causal relationship. This simplified causal logic directly links Consort Hua's tragic fate to imperial oppression, allowing viewers to rapidly empathize with her "victimhood" without the need for lengthy pharmacological explanations, and thereby increases the tension of the palace-intrigue narrative.



Figure 14. Scene of Huan Yi Xiang Being Used Daily in Consort Hua's Palace. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.4.3. Bitter Almond Poisoning

In the scene of An Lingrong's death in the Cold Palace, the camera presents a plate of unfinished bitter almonds juxtaposed with her sudden death, preserving narrative openness while leading viewers to form the perception that "bitter almonds can cause poisoning or even death." This completely overlooks the scientific fact that a lethal dose in reality requires approximately 50-60 kernels.

This clever simplification of dosage strengthens persuasive power by synergizing with the emotional flow [29]. When viewers witness An Lingrong's reversal from favor to abandonment and then see her die immediately after consuming only part of the almonds, the emotional tension of the narrative reaches its peak. The visual contrast between "unfinished bitter almonds" and rapid death produces a striking emotional reversal, imprinting the simplified belief that bitter almonds are inherently lethal at the moment when viewers are most emotionally invested. By omitting the dosage relationship, the drama turns "a plate of bitter almonds" into a symbolic marker of An Lingrong's tragic end. It both simplifies the causal logic of "poisoning" and reinforces the emotional atmosphere of "fall from grace and death in despair," enhancing the narrative's emotional impact.



Figure 15. Close-Up of Unfinished Bitter Apricot Seeds Alongside An Lingrong's Body. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.5. Selective Narrative Rhetoric: Conveying TCM Knowledge to the Public

Selective Narrative Rhetoric refers to a narrative strategy wherein creators, based on specific knowledge dissemination goals, select and focus on plot elements, details, or perspectives closely related to the core theme while omitting secondary or distracting content. Through "selection and emphasis," it shapes audience cognition and enhances knowledge communication effects. Its core lies in "stories serving knowledge dissemination" [30]. As Boje [7] noted, selective narrative essentially involves the careful integration of narrative fragments, prioritizing information that aligns with knowledge dissemination intentions to guide audiences in efficiently perceiving core content. In mass media, this rhetoric effectively simplifies complex professional knowledge by focusing on core principles through life-related scenarios, reducing cognitive load and helping professional knowledge break through communication barriers [1]-a logic highly consistent with medical dramas conveying key health information through selective clinical scenarios [14].

The core logic of Legend of Zhen Huan in using selective narrative rhetoric to convey Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) knowledge is "de-professionalization, strong contextualization, and emphasis on practicality." Instead of pursuing systematic completeness of TCM theories, the drama selectively extracts practical knowledge such as medicinal properties, dietary health preservation, and

daily conditioning around the goal of "being understandable, memorable, and usable for the public." It strips away complex professional details like syndrome differentiation and formula compatibility, embedding TCM knowledge into high-frequency scenarios such as palace life and interpersonal interactions. Through the pathway of "knowledge selection to contextual embedding to effect enhancement," combined with a small amount of logic related to the 3O theory to strengthen persuasiveness, audiences subtly absorb TCM common sense while immersing themselves in the plot, achieving the communication effect of "edutainment." As Furman and Clayton [8] emphasized, the selective presentation of medical knowledge in mass media can transform abstract theories into narrative-driven cognitive points. It is precisely through this strategy that Legend of Zhen Huan brings TCM knowledge from professional fields to public life.

8.5.1. Focus on Practical Efficacy and Omit Professional Redundancy

When conveying TCM knowledge, the drama prioritizes the daily practical efficacy of medicinal materials, selectively omitting professional redundant information, and reinforces cognition with simple logical appeal (Logos) to enable the public to quickly grasp core value. Taking motherwort as an example, in TCM theory, it is a key medicinal herb for "activating blood circulation to regulate menstruation and inducing diuresis to reduce edema," with a contraindication of "avoid use during pregnancy." However, the drama selectively focuses on its external efficacy of "activating blood circulation to nourish the skin." During her stay in Ganlu Temple, Zhen Huan plants motherwort herself and asks the imperial physician to formulate skin care powder with it, ultimately transforming her haggard complexion into a radiant one. Through the clear causal chain of "applying motherwort-based preparations to improved skin complexion," the plot aligns with the basic TCM logic of "activating blood circulation to moisten the skin," only conveying the core knowledge that "motherwort can be used externally for skin care" while making no mention of its gynecological medicinal efficacy, contraindications, or pharmacological mechanisms. This choice is consistent with Boje's [7] view that "selective narrative amplifies core information." By stripping away professional redundancy and strengthening logical connections, it avoids audience confusion, presenting TCM knowledge in a "simple, direct, and demand-oriented" form, significantly lowering the understanding threshold and catering to the public's preference for practical knowledge such as "skin care."



Figure 16. Zhen Huan Explaining She Uses Shenxian Yunu Fen (Immortal Jade Maiden Powder) with Motherwort for Skin Care. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.5.2. Embed in Daily Scenarios and Strengthen Life Relevance

The drama embeds selected TCM knowledge into high-frequency daily scenarios such as dietary intake and daily conditioning, strengthening relevance through "binding knowledge to life scenarios"

and stimulating resonance with emotional appeal (Pathos) to enhance the public's willingness to accept it.

Taking lily bulb as an example, among its dual efficacies of "nourishing yin to moisten the lung and clearing the heart to calm the mind," the drama selectively focuses on the "sedative" effect related to daily fatigue and insomnia. It sets up a plot where the emperor, distressed by heavy state affairs and restless mood, is regularly served mung bean and lily congee or lily and lotus seed soup by the empress and empress dowager. Through the intuitive change of "feeling relaxed and being able to handle state affairs at ease after consumption," it conveys the knowledge that "lily bulb can calm the mind and relieve fatigue." Meanwhile, the scenario of the emperor's overwork resonates with the public's daily exhaustion, making the knowledge more acceptable.

The drama does not delve into professional content such as the nature, flavor, and meridian tropism of lily bulb or its applicable syndromes, but integrates it into the life-familiar scenario of "daily dietary health preservation." This choice echoes Sharf and Vanderford's [1] view that "effective health communication needs to bind to audiences' life scenarios," transforming TCM knowledge from a professional theoretical framework into a directly applicable daily health preservation method. As Thompson et al. [25] noted, life-related scenarios can significantly improve the acceptance of professional knowledge.



Figure 17. Close-Up of Lily Bulb and Lotus Seed Soup for Calming the Mind. Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

8.5.3. Strengthen Sensory Experience and Weaken Theoretical Preaching

The drama replaces abstract theoretical preaching by selectively presenting sensory details (visual, taste, tactile) related to TCM, and enhances credibility through ethical appeal (Ethos), making TCM knowledge more appealing and deepening memory effects. Taking lotus root starch and osmanthus cake as an example, the drama selectively focuses on the dietary health effects of lotus root starch ("invigorating the spleen and nourishing blood") and osmanthus ("moistening the spleen and refreshing the stomach"). Through the plot of Shen Meizhuang making the cake and sharing it with Zhen Huan, it presents the cake's mild texture, sweet aroma, and the comfortable feeling after consumption, only implying its health value through the daily context of "being soothing and nourishing." Shen Meizhuang's gentle and exquisite image, combined with the implicit endorsement

indirectly recognized by the imperial physician, endows the dietary health knowledge with natural credibility and weakens the sense of distance caused by professional thresholds. This choice is consistent with Czarniawska [30] view that "detail focus shapes cognition." Through sensory and experiential plot presentation, TCM knowledge becomes perceptible. Compared with abstract theoretical explanations, this concrete form of knowledge transmission better mobilizes audience emotions. As Furman and Clayton [8] observed, the sensory presentation of medical-related knowledge in media, combined with implicit authoritative endorsement, can significantly strengthen memory effects, leaving a deep impression of core TCM concepts such as "the homology of medicine and food" in the public's minds.



Figure 18. Scene of the Emperor Tasting the Sweet Lotus Root Starch and Osmanthus Cake.
Source: Legend of Zhen Huan [TV series]. (2011). Dragon TV

9. Discussion

9.1. Key Findings and Theoretical Implications for Public Health Communication

This study's analysis of Legend of Zhen Huan reveals practical insights into how narrative rhetoric advances public health communication-specifically, how edutainment breaks down knowledge barriers by reimagining complex traditional medical knowledge as relatable stories. The five interrelated strategies identified-narrative repetition, concretization, visualization, simplification, and selective narration-collectively demonstrate that effective health communication does not require diluting content, but rather aligning it with how people naturally learn and engage.

Narrative repetition leverages familiarity and reinforcement [3] to embed core health messages in public consciousness. By revisiting key principles through varied scenarios, it avoids monotony while strengthening memory-proving that repeated health information is more impactful when woven into diverse, story-driven contexts rather than delivered as didactic lectures. For public health, this means core guidelines (e.g., medicinal precautions) are more likely to stick when audiences encounter them organically through engaging narratives.

Narrative concretization and visualization solve the challenge of abstract medical concepts by translating invisible theories into tangible outcomes and sensory experiences. Concretization links medical properties to observable consequences, while visualization uses props, scenes, and actions to make complex practices intuitive-together, they reduce cognitive effort and make culturally specific systems like TCM feel universal [4, 5]. This shows that health knowledge becomes accessible when rooted in relatable, perceptible experiences rather than abstract explanations.

Narrative simplification and selective narration strike a critical balance between accessibility and accuracy. Simplification trims unnecessary technical details while preserving actionable knowledge [6], and selective narration prioritizes content tied to daily life [7]. These strategies challenge the myth that "accessible" equals "less rigorous"; instead, they curate what audiences need to know, ensuring health information feels applicable to everyday life rather than confined to professional settings.

Collectively, these findings redefine edutainment's role in public health: unlike traditional campaigns relying on authority or fear, the drama's strategies engage audiences through emotional connection and relatable contexts [9]. By weaving TCM into compelling storylines, it turns cultural heritage into usable knowledge, proving edutainment can transcend cognitive and cultural barriers-especially valuable for traditional medical systems often sidelined for their abstractness.

9.2. Limitations of the Study

This research has two key limitations. First, the focus on Legend of Zhen Huan-a historical imperial harem drama-means its strategies may be genre-specific and not universally applicable to other edutainment formats (e.g., modern sitcoms, social media shorts). Second, relying solely on textual analysis without audience reception data means we cannot empirically verify if these strategies improve knowledge retention, reduce misconceptions, or shape attitudes toward TCM. Future research should address these gaps to confirm real-world efficacy.

9.3. Implications and Future Research Directions

The findings offer a replicable framework for public health communicators: repeat core messages with contextual variation, concretize abstract ideas into relatable outcomes, visualize key practices, simplify technical details to retain utility, and prioritize life-related content. This framework balances engagement and accuracy [11], guiding creators to make specialized health knowledge both interesting and factually sound.

For future research, three avenues are promising: comparative analysis across edutainment genres to test strategy universality; empirical audience research (e.g., pre/post-viewing tests, focus groups) to measure real-world impact; and cross-cultural studies to explore how these narratives resonate with global audiences [13], ensuring strategies transcend cultural boundaries.

In summary, Legend of Zhen Huan's success demonstrates that edutainment reduces knowledge barriers not by simplifying content, but by reimagining it as storytelling. By centering relevance, emotion, and accessibility, public health communicators can turn specialized knowledge into something audiences recognize, remember, and use-empowering health literacy and preserving cultural heritage.

10. Conclusion

This study addresses a key gap in traditional medical knowledge communication: how mainstream media can translate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)'s abstract concepts and cultural specificity into public-accessible content. Focusing on Legend of Zhen Huan, qualitative textual analysis confirms the core thesis: the drama employs five interrelated narrative rhetorical strategies-narrative repetition, concretization, visualization, simplification, and selective narration-to "deprofessionalize" TCM without compromising core validity, achieving the critical "edutainment" effect.

Contextualized within TCM's status as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage and growing public demand for accessible health knowledge, the findings highlight that media narratives, when guided by intentional rhetorical strategies, serve as powerful bridges between professional expertise and public understanding. By weaving TCM into relatable character arcs and daily scenarios, the drama transforms cultural heritage into "lived knowledge" that audiences can recognize, connect to, and apply.

Acknowledging limitations-including a narrow focus on one drama and lack of audience reception data-future research could explore comparative analyses of TCM media across genres and empirical studies of viewer understanding. Ultimately, the strategies identified offer a replicable framework for future media, guiding creators to balance accessibility and accuracy, preserve cultural depth, and ensure ancient health wisdom endures as a relevant resource for public health literacy. This study thus contributes to both understanding TCM's media communication and safeguarding cultural heritage while empowering public health.

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