

TCM on path to underpin Macao's indigenous industrial prowess

By Li Qiaoyi and Tu Lei in Zhuhai
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Zhuhai UM Science & Technology Research Institute on the Hengqin island on September 28, 2021. Photo: Li Qiaoyi/GT

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), one of the main industries to diversify Macao's economy, will be riding the waves of an innovation-oriented testing ground connecting the special administrative region (SAR) with its neighbor Hengqin island to catapult the sector into a mainstay of Macao's indigenous industrial prowess, according to local medical researchers and TCM manufacturers.

The TCM-fueled diversification will over time make TCM-based healthcare products and services shine convincingly across a bigger part of the world, they noted.

The in-depth cooperation zone on Hengqin island could well become a promised land where Macao's research capabilities and its advantages in terms of TCM standard-setting and quality control would extend beyond the small city, Wang Chunming, associate professor of the Institute of Chinese Medical Sciences at the University of Macau (UM), told the Global Times on Tuesday.



A general plan for building a Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone released in early September set out a vision for TCM, among other Made in Macao industries, alongside high-tech research and development (R&D) and advanced manufacturing, culture, tourism and the exhibition business, and the modern financial sector, to foster Macao's economic diversification.

At a meeting of the central government on Tuesday, high-level highlands for talent were encouraged in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Beijing and Shanghai. National laboratories and new R&D research institutes will be given higher emphasis.

The city is in pole position to develop TCM, with the Ministry of Science and Technology approving the establishment of the first state key laboratory in Chinese medicine at UM at the end of 2010.

A push for TCM was also on the front burner of Macao's first five-year plan (2016-20) and makes up a significant part of its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative.

As the plan for building the in-depth cooperation zone unfolds, it is hoped that some breakthroughs the UM's state key laboratory made in recent years - in quality control criteria, for instance - can be applied in the zone, which is intended to serve as a platform to facilitate the translation of TCM-related research findings into commercial successes, Wang said, hoping for the zone to allow for the availability of globally recognized standards for Chinese medicine.

A UM-Zhuhai joint laboratory is under construction, aimed at success in Chinese medicine and translational research.

Translational research is aimed at solving specific problems. The term is mostly used in life sciences and biotechnology.

Moreover, the SAR could tap into the zone, over three times the land area of Macao, for its limited TCM processing abilities to be substantially expanded, he suggested.

As part of the TCM drive, an industrial park on Hengqin island dedicated to TCM science and technology cooperation between Guangdong and Macao that officially became operational in 2013, is also envisioned to be a pivotal contributor to Macao's indigenous TCM strength, especially when considering the SAR as a cornerstone for globalizing Chinese herbs.

"Support policies from the central government give us abundant opportunities to reach out to overseas markets," Mona lan, executive director of Authenmole (Zhuhai Hengqin) Traditional Chinese Medicine and Health Industry Development Co, told the Global Times on Monday at her office in the industrial park.

The company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Macao Authenmole Biotech Inc, specializes in R&D, production and sales of natural tea and plant extracts, based on its patented plant low-temperature extraction and efficient separation integration technology.

With an investment of 50 million yuan (\$7.74 million) on equipment, the company started operations in September after gaining relevant licenses from local authorities in Hengqin in June.

Tiny yet sophisticated, Macao's TCM manufacturing is known for its expertise in innovation and quality control, Wang Ning with CCID Consulting, a research institute under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, wrote in a research report earlier in September.

Its Chinese medicine industry raked in 60 million yuan in output terms in 2019, accounting for merely 1 percent of Macao's entire manufacturing output.

However, it topped the profitability ranking with a profit margin of 30.4 percent and was the fastest-growing with an industrial output growth rate of 77.2 percent, said the report.



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