Constructing a nursing theoretical system with characteristics of Chinese culture

Xiuhua Li
President, Chinese Nursing Association

Since Nightingale established modern nursing studies, nursing is becoming a mature discipline encompassing scientific research methods, unique research fields in nursing and a rounded theoretical system, providing health services to the individuals and their family in medical settings, community and public health field as important as medicine after development for hundreds of years. The establishment of nursing theoretical system plays an important role in the process of nursing specialization, and provides the essential prerequisite and foundation which make nursing a professional and scientific discipline. The history of nursing showed that most nursing theories were founded by American nursing scholars who represent western civilization, and nursing professionals from the United States stay the leading position in nursing development.

Traditional Chinese Medicine has a long history. The development of nursing science in China is influenced by the development of traditional Chinese medicine and the development of nursing science in western countries. In 1888, following foreign missionaries’ medical practicing in China, the first nursing school in China was founded in Fuzhou, Fujian Province using western nursing training system as a reference. The first Chinese nursing vocational education system was established after 1949. University level nursing education was restarted in 1984 and has been optimized since then. In 2011, Academic Degree Commission of State Council in China upgraded nursing to the first level discipline from the second level under division of medicine. In 2013, Chinese Nursing Association returned to be a member of the International Council of Nurses, which is a symbol that Chinese nurses are playing an increasingly important role in the international arena. In recent years, Nursing in China has made great progresses, the total number of nurses have increased and the quality of nursing education keeps improving, and the connotation of Nursing has been constantly enriched and its horizon has been expanded. With the trend of global integration, like other countries China is facing the changes from increased health demand, economic development and natural environment. Nursing in China is facing new opportunities as well as challenges, and the development of nursing theory based on Chinese culture and current circumstances nationally will become a driving force for the development of nursing in China.

In 1980s, nursing scholars from China began to consider using the western nursing theories to guide nursing practice in China. Orem’s self-care theory, Roy’s adaptation model, Neuman’s system model are widely applied in nursing education and practice in China, which have had great impact on the development of nursing discipline in China. However, due to the different background and culture of western nursing theories, the effect of applying these western theories in nursing practice in China was not as significant as expected in the past. Some scholars pointed out that the application of nursing theories in China was still in the early stage: learning, understanding and verifying the application of the western nursing theories. The reason for this could be that Chinese nursing scholars always aimed to completely connect with foreign theoretical models when applying these models in Chinese nursing practice, however the formation of these theories should be based on certain cultures and backgrounds which are hugely different from China, which are the causes of the contradiction and conflict in applying western nursing theories in Chinese nursing practice.

The development of theories must consider Chinese culture and base on Chinese reality to make sure that the characteristics of Chinese culture and needs from local nursing practice are well addressed, but not only learning and following the example of nursing models from foreign countries. The Chinese nation has a long history and profound culture, and a unique special philosophy. Chinese civilization has been well respected worldwide. The establishment and development of Chinese nursing theory is based on the concepts of “human, health, environment, nursing” which are also the foundation and framework. China, as the representative of the Oriental civilization, is in full rise, the establishment of Chinese nursing theoretical system will also play a role in promoting the development of nursing in the Asia Pacific Region.

It is the responsibility and historical mission for all the Chinese nursing scholars to construct a nursing theoretical system with consideration of Chinese culture, which is more suitable for the actual situation of China and reflects the essence of Chinese culture.
nursing, guides nursing practice, improves nursing staff’s identification, shortens the gap between theory and practice, and also eventually improves the quality of nursing. From the perspectives of discipline construction, establishing Chinese nursing theoretical system which is based on the Chinese cultural value will broaden the research horizon of nursing theory, increase the opportunities of equal dialogue with the international nursing society and have positive effect on solving problems in developing nursing discipline in China. It is the important responsibility for Chinese Nursing Association to lead the development of nursing discipline in China and provide supports for the study of Chinese nursing theory. To achieve this, I hope all the nursing scholars take further actions in studying and developing Chinese nursing theoretical model which incorporates with Chinese culture and forms a diverse academic atmosphere!