Comparative study on WHO Western Pacific Region and World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies international standard terminologies on traditional medicine: an analysis of the Body Constituents

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WHO 西太区与世界中医药学会联合会中医名词术语国际标准比较研究: 形体部分

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The terms concerning body constituents in traditional Chinese medicine, comparatively speaking, are somewhat limited because the components of human body are limited. So altogether there are only 29 included in WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region¹ (abbreviated as WHO Standard), and 48 in International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies² (abbreviated as WFCMS Standard).

Compared with the terms of the basic theory of traditional Chinese medicine, the terms concerning body constituents are quite specific in referent and concrete in connotation. So it is generally agreed that the terms of body constituents are easier to understand and translate. That is why the English translation of these terms in the two standards is, on the whole, similar to each other and accords with the current practice. However, subtle differences still can be found in some cases, which is, objectively speaking, quite normal. In the current translation practice, different translators may follow different methods and have different ideas about how to translate the concepts and terms concerning body constituents.

In view of the two international standards and in the light of the theory and practice discussed in the book entitled International Standardization of English Translation of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Study of Theory, Summarization of Practice and Exploration of Methods³, this article tries to briefly analyze the English translation of the terms concerning body constituents.
constituents. In order to make it easier for readers to understand how these terms are understood and translated in these two international standards, the related definitions, according to the descriptions in WHO Standard, are provided as reference.

形体 body constituent — a collective term for skin, vessels, flesh, sinews and bones

皮肤 skin and body hair — a collective term for the skin and its fine hair

腠理 interstices — a term referring to the striae of the skin, muscles and viscera, and also to the tissue between the skin and muscles

In WFCMS Standard, there is no such an entry as 形体, but the term 形 is included, which means physique. In Chinese, 形体 and 形 are almost identical with each other in connotation, referring to the body. However in WFCMS Standard, 形 is translated as physique; in WHO Standard, 形体 is translated as body constituent. The so-called 腠理 refers to the vein and texture of muscles and space between skin and muscles, which serve as one of the passages for qi and blood to flow and body fluid to discharge. The translation of 腠理 varies greatly in current practice. Some translators have rendered it as interstitial space, others as striae and still others as space between skin and muscles. In WFCMS Standard, it is translated as striae and interstice, an integral way and a new trial of translation. These different translations have all revealed some basic meanings of this special term, but are still in need of further improvement so as to make it easier to standardize in international communication.

玄府 mysterious mansion

The so-called 玄府 is another name for sweat pore. That is why it is so translated in WFCMS Standard. In Chinese, 玄 means dark and mysterious and 府 means house or palace. Sweat pores are too minute to be visible and their mechanism is too mysterious to reveal. That is why they are called 玄府. So if 玄府 is simply put into sweat pore, the special implication in the original term can hardly be revealed. In view of cultural background and information revelation, translating 玄府 as mysterious mansion in WHO Standard seems to be more objective and acceptable.

气门 qi gate

The so-called 气门 is another name for sweat pore. To translate it as qi gate sounds quite complicated and abstruse, making it very easily to be confused with the special concept of qi in the basic theory of traditional Chinese medicine. If it is rendered as sweat pore, it sounds quite specific and clear, but readers will be deprived of the possibility to understand the rich and unique system of Chinese medical lexicology.

赤白肉际 border between the red and white fleshes — the skin boundary between the palm or sole (red in color) and the back of the hand or foot (white in color), respectively

Just as the definition suggests, 赤白肉际 bears specific referent and therefore can be translated clearly and concisely. In the current translation practice, this term is also frequently rendered as dorsoventral boundary of the hand or foot. Semantically speaking, the translation of this term in WHO Standard seems not specifically enough and needs further improvement.

筋 sinew

In Chinese, 筋 refers to tough band or cord of tissue that joins muscle to bone, and is frequently translated as tendon. In WFCMS Standard, both ways of translation are included.

宗筋 ancestral sinew

In traditional Chinese medicine, 宗筋 means two things, one is the external genitals and the other is penis. Since its meaning is complicated, it was transliterated as zongjin in the past. In WHO Standard, it is translated as ancestral sinew. Though obviously literal translation, it may explain and hint something implied in the original term. In WFCMS Standard, 宗筋 is rendered in two ways: 1) all tendons; 2) penis and testes. Such a way of translation is, undoubtedly, objective.

溪谷 muscle interspace — the gap junction or depression between two muscles

In Chinese, 溪谷 refers to the space or depressions between limbs and muscles. In traditional Chinese medicine, large space between muscles and limbs is called 谷 while small depression is called 溪. In the chapter of Discussion on Acupoints in Plain Conversation (《素问·气穴论》), it says that “large convergence of muscles is 谷 and small convergence of muscles is 溪”(8). According to such an explanation, the translation of 溪谷 as muscle interspace in WHO Standard is somewhat unspecific. To make it more distinctive, 溪 may be translated as small muscle interspace and 谷 as large muscle interspace. Sometimes 溪谷 also
refers to meridians and acupoints. In this case, 胸中 is used to describe the regions along which the twelve meridians run and 胸中 is used to describe the regions where acupoints are located. Such descriptions can be found in the canons of traditional Chinese medicine. In the chapter of *Discussion on the Formation of the Five Zang-organs in Plain Conversation* (《素问·五脏生成篇》), for instance, it says that “in the human body there are twelve degrees of major meridians (大谷), three hundred and fifty-four acupoints (小溪)” [4].

胸中 chest center

In Chinese, 胸中 means two different things, one is the center of the chest between the nipples and the other is an acupoint. If it refers to the former, it can be translated as chest center as is done in WHO Standard.

胃脘 stomach duct — stomach cavity and adjoining section esophagus; epigastrium of the stomach

As the definition suggests, 胃脘 actually refers to the cavity of the stomach with the superficial position corresponding to the epigastrium. To translate 胃脘 as stomach duct seems somewhat different from the original meaning of this term.

胸胁 chest and hypochondrium — the portion of the body between the neck and the abdomen and the superolateral regions of the abdomen, overlying the costal cartilages

膜原; 膜原 membrane source — pleurodiaphragmatic interspace; interior-exterior interspace where the pathogens of epidemic febrile disease tends to settle

To translate 膜原 as pleurodiaphragmatic interspace seems quite specific and easy to understand. But in Chinese philosophy, a term or a concept is usually quite abstruse, involving many things that appear unrelated to each other on the surface. That is why 膜原 was transliterated as moyuan in the past because it is not something as simple and concrete as skin and hair. The idea of 膜原 was first mentioned in the chapter of *Discussion on Pain in Plain Conversation* (《素问·举痛论》), suggesting that “pathogenic cold is retained between the intestines and stomach and below 膜原” [4]. But the specific location of 膜原 was not mentioned.

In explaining the idea of 膜原, Wang Bing (王冰), a scholar in the Tang Dynasty (唐代) said that “膜 refers to the region between the diaphragm while 膜原 refers to the space between the heart and the diaphragm (膜, 谓膈间之膜; 膜原, 谓膈育之原)” [5]. A Japanese scholar (丹波元简) said in the chapter of textual research on moyuan in his book entitled *Appendices of Medical Literature* (《医刺附录·膜原考》) that “moyuan refers to the membranous part of the diaphragm that is attached to the seventh thoracic vertebra [至第胸(膜)之系, 附着脊之第七椎, 即是膜原也]” [5], a quite clear and specific description about the location of 膜原. However, such a concrete description is somewhat subjective according to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine.

With the development of traditional Chinese medicine, the connotation of 膜原 was further enriched and became more complicated. In syndrome differentiation concerning warm diseases (温病辨证), for instance, 膜原 refers to the part between the exterior and interior. In *Synopsis on Pestilence* (《温疫论》), for example, it says that “The pathogenic factors are not far away from the exterior region and is quite near the stomach. The pathogenic factors are retained in the region between the meridians and stomach, that is why the syndrome caused is known as half interior and half exterior syndrome (其邪去表不远, 附于中. ……邪在膜原, 正当经胃交关之所, 作半表半里)” [5].

Based on the discussions and suggestions made by different scholars in different books, A Concise Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine defines 膜原 as the place between the pleura and diaphragm (胸膜与膈肌之间) [5]. Perhaps that is why 膜原 was so translated in WHO Standard and WFCMS Standard.

膈俞 cardiophlegmatic interspace — the space inferior to the heart and superior to the diaphragm

In the current translation practice, 膈俞 is frequently transliterated because its connotation is complicated and unclear even in the theory of traditional Chinese medicine. According to the current explanations in the field of traditional Chinese medicine, 膈俞 refers to the region below the heart and 膈俞 the region below the heart and above the diaphragm. Perhaps this explanation is correct. But the fact is that 膈俞 is often used to describe the severity of a disease. For instance in the Chinese expression 病入膈俞, the phrase 膈俞 simply means severe or incurable.

小腹; 少腹 lower abdomen — the part of
abdomen between the umbilicus and the upper margin of pubic bone

para-umbilical region — that part of abdomen lateral to the umbilicus
infra-umbilical region — that part of abdomen inferior to the umbilicus

The expressions of para and infra are not technical terms in traditional Chinese medicine as compared with the terms as five zang-organs (五脏) and six fu-organs (六腑). They are just common expressions and can be simply translated as beside the navel/umbilicus and below the navel/umbilicus as is frequent done in the current translation practice.

In WFCMS Standard,眉棱骨 is translated as supraorbital ridge and sounds more technical as compared with eyebrow bone. However, the expression of eyebrow bone seems quite clear in meaning and easier to understand, appearing more convenient and effective for people to communicate with each other.

vertebrae — a collective term for the cervical vertebrae
vertebrae — a collective term of the thoracic, lumbar and sacral vertebrae, the same as spine
lumbar vertebrae — lumbar bone
assisting bone — the bony prominences on the sides of the knee, namely, the condyles of femur and the condyles of tibia
high bone — any bony process of the body surface, particularly referring to the styloid process of the radius

In WFCMS Standard, 眉棱骨 is translated as lumbar bone. In Chinese, 腰骨 means two things; 1) fibula and radius, 2) condyles at knee; 髋骨 also means two things; 1) protruding bone, 2) lumbar vertebra. The translations of these terms in both standards are clear and concise. Comparatively speaking, the translations in WHO Standard seem more common and quite corresponding to the original Chinese terms in structure. Such a way of translation is perhaps convenient for international standardization of traditional Chinese medical terminologies.

prominent muscle — paravertebral muscle; the muscle below the iliac crest

In WHO Standard, 腰 is defined in two different ways. In fact in traditional Chinese medicine, 腰 just refers to a group of eminent and bountiful muscles. Paravertebral muscle (脊椎两侧肌肉) and the muscle below the iliac crest (髂骨部骼骨以下肌肉) are just two examples of 腰, not the definition of it.

house of bright essence — an expression referring to the head

The so-called 精明之府 obviously refers to the head which houses mind, intelligence and thinking. That is why it is often simply rendered as head. Though such a way of translation is clear in meaning and easier to understand, it fails to reveal the rich connotations of 精明之府. In the chapter of Essential Discussion on Pulse in Plain Conversation (《素问·脉要精微论》), for instance, it says that the head is the house of
essence and intelligence (头者，精明之府)\(^1\). When explaining such an abstruse description, the book entitled *Full Collection of Medical Literature* (《医部全录·头门》) says that “The essence of all the yang meridians all reaches the head and so does the essence of all marrow. That is why the head is called the house of essence, marrow, spirit and intelligence\(^2\). According to such an explanation, 精 refers to essence (精微), 明 refers to mentality or mind (神明). In WFCMS Standard, 精明 is defined in three different ways; 1) eye; 2) vision; 3) Jingming (BL 1). However, to explain 精明 as Jingming (BL 1) is obviously a misunderstanding because Jingming (BL 1) is the transliteration of 精明, not 精明.

脑户 back of the head — the occipital region
太阳 (太阳穴 temper — 1) the area on each side of the forehead above the cheek bones, lateral to and slightly superior to the outer canthus of the eye; 2) an non-meridian acupuncture point on the temporal part of the head

精室 essence chamber — the part of the body where the semen is stored in a male
精窍 essence orifice — the external orifice of the male urethra, from which the semen is discharged

To translate 精室 as essence chamber and 精窍 as essence orifice needs further consideration. Since 精室 is the part of the body where the semen is stored in a male, 精 certainly not essence, but semen. Since 精窍 is the external orifice of the male urethra, from which the semen is discharged, 精 obviously refers to semen, not essence.

睾 testicle — the male reproductive organ where the sperms are produced

前阴 anterior yin — the external genitalia including the external orifice of the urethra

后阴 posterior yin — the anus, the posterior opening of the large intestine

To render 前阴 as anterior yin and 后阴 as posterior yin seems more tactful than external genitalia and anus, but appearing somewhat abstract. However, in view of euphemism, the translation of 前阴 and 后阴 as anterior yin and posterior yin seems quite necessary and practical.

卫分 defense aspect — the most superficial stratum of the body apt to be invaded at the initial stage of an acute febrile disease, often referring to the lung

气分 qi aspect — the second stratum of the body deeper than the defense aspect, often referring to the lung, gallbladder, spleen, stomach and large intestine

营分 nutrient aspect — that stratum of the body between the qi and blood aspects

血分 blood aspect — the deepest stratum of the body involved in the severest stage of an acute febrile disease

The Chinese character 分 in the concepts of 卫分, 气分, 营分 and 血分 is also translated as phase or level. However for quite a long time in the translation practice, these four concepts have also been frequently transliterated because of their abstract connotations. In order to make it easier for international readers to understand, more and more translators now have adopted liberal translation method to deal with these concepts in their translation.

In terms of translation methods, most of the terms concerning body constituents mentioned above are translated literally, such as translating 皮毛 into skin and hair, 宗筋 into ancestral sinew and 少腹 into lower abdomen. This is also a quite commonly used method applied in the current translation of traditional Chinese medical terminologies.

However, due to the complicated and abstract connotations of Chinese medical concepts and terminologies, some of the terms are difficult to be translated literally. In this case, liberal translation method is used in both standards to deal with some special terms. To translate 膈理 into interstices, 至下而际 into border between the red and white fleshes, 至中 into chest center and 丹田 into cinnabar field are the typical examples of liberal translation. Some of the liberally translated terms seem strange at first sight, such as the translation of 丹田 into cinnabar field. However, further consideration indicates that such liberally translated terms may just reveal some of the features typical of Chinese.

Some of the Chinese terms look abstruse on the surface, but appears quite specific in connotation. To deal with this kind of terms, WHO Standard has adopted liberal way of translation to translate, for instance, translating 目䀝 into skeleton, 太阳 into temple and 泪堂 into lacrimal orifice. Such a way of translation has revealed the basic connotations of these terms and is thus quite acceptable.

The discussion made above is just a brief comparative analysis of WHO Standard and
WFCMS Standard on the terms concerning body constituents in traditional Chinese medicine. This analysis shows that some of the terms concerning body constituents are easy to understand and translate because they are specific in referent and concrete in connotation. But some of the terms of this category are not so specific in connotation for traditional Chinese medicine is unique in explaining the structure and revealing the functions of certain parts of human body, making the connotation of the concerned terms and concepts abstruse and complicated, giving rise to varied translations and bringing about much difficulty in translation standardization. The differences found in the two standards, WHO Standard and WFCMS Standard, have objectively revealed such a reality in the current practice of translation.

REFERENCES

1 World Health Organization Western Pacific Region. WHO international standard terminologies on traditional medicine in the Western Pacific Region. 2007.


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中华中医药学会“第四届国际中医糖尿病大会”征文通知

由中华中医药学会主办的“第四届国际中医糖尿病大会”将于2009年8月7～9日在北京召开。大会主题为“肥胖与糖尿病”，欢迎从事相关基础和临床研究、临床诊疗、预防、护理、药物研发、营养等领域的中医、西医和中西医结合专业工作者踊跃投稿。

征文内容 (1)中医、中西医结合防治糖尿病标准化的探讨；(2)中医、中西医结合对糖尿病的规范化治疗及临床疗效评价；(3)中医药在肥胖与糖尿病及其并发症临床诊疗中的基础理论、应用与研究；(4)中医、中西医结合临床肥胖病及并发症的国际新动态及研究进展；(5)现代科学技术在中医药防治肥胖与糖尿病及其并发症研究中的应用；(6)多学科交叉研究中医药防治肥胖与糖尿病及其并发症的思路与方法。

征文要求 (1)未在国内外刊物上公开发表；(2)投稿需提交论文全文，并包括800字左右的中文摘要以及不少于200字的英文摘要；(3)论文应注明题目、作者、联系电话、工作单位、通讯地址、邮政编码、电子信箱；(4)来稿一律不退，请自留底稿；(5)论文以附件形式发送至diabetes2009@gmail.com或diabetes2009@hotmail.com；(6)截稿时间：2009年5月30日。

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