Comparative study on WHO Western Pacific Region and World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies international standard terminologies on traditional medicine: an analysis of the Mechanism of Diseases (Part 1)

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WHO 西太区与世界中医药学联合会中医名词术语
国际标准比较研究：病机部分(一)

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关键词：语言学；科学技术语；翻译；英语；中医名词；病机

In traditional Chinese medicine, there are quite a number of terms, phrases and expressions used to describe pathogenesis of diseases. The English word pathogenesis is frequently used to translate the Chinese concept of 病机 which literally means the mechanism of a disease. Such a translation, though still under debate, has been generally accepted by more and more translators.

Altogether there are 363 terms related to the mechanism of diseases included in WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region2 (abbreviated as WHO Standard). While in the International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine2 compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (abbreviated as WFCMS Standard), 528 terms are included.

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 pathogenesis of diseases. 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.

病机 mechanism of disease; the mechanism by which disease arises and develops, the same as pathogenesis

病机学说 theory of mechanism of disease; the theory that deals with the mechanism by which
As mentioned above, pathogenesis is also frequently used to translate 病机. However in WHO Standard, the translation is different. In the current translation field, there are some translators who have rendered 病机 into mechanism of disease or pathological mechanism which is obviously a literal translation. In WFCMS Standard, the word mechanism is also used to translate 机. However pathogenesis is also included as the second choice for the translation of 病机, reflecting the reality in translation practice.

病位 location of disease; the part of the body affected by a disease

病性 nature of disease; the heat, cold, excess or deficiency quality of a disease

病证 disease pattern; summarization of the cause, nature and location of the pathological change at a certain stage of disease

As to the translation of 证 in traditional Chinese medicine, the word syndrome is, comparatively speaking, used much more frequently than the word pattern. In traditional Chinese medicine, 证 is a generalization of the progress of a disease at a certain period, including its nature, location, manifestations, prognosis and the concerned therapeutic methods. Traditionally the word syndrome is used to translate 证. Though syndrome is not the exact equivalent of 证 in English, it has basically revealed the connotation of this special Chinese medical concept. The word pattern, comparatively speaking, is a little different. Semantically speaking, it may be proper to use the word pattern to translate 证型 (patterns of a syndrome). In WHO and WFCMS Standards, both syndrome and pattern are used to translate 证, with certain variations of course. In WHO Standard, pattern is the first choice and syndrome is the second. While in WFCMS Standard, the opposite is just the case.

正邪相争 struggle between the healthy qi and pathogenic qi; the basic mechanism of disease in which any disease is considered as the process of struggle between the healthy qi and pathogenic qi

邪正盛衰; 邪正消长 exuberance and debilitation of the healthy qi or pathogenic qi; the key factor that determines the process of disease and prognosis, namely, rise of the healthy qi with decline of the pathogenic qi leading to improvement and cure, while exuberance of the pathogenic qi with debilitation of the healthy qi resulting in deterioration and even death

To translate 正 into healthy qi is, of course, natural and appropriate. However, to translate 邪 into pathogenic qi seems unclear or even confusing. In traditional Chinese medicine, when we talk about 邪气, the character 气 is concrete in connotation, referring to various factors or elements causing diseases. In WFCMS Standard, 邪气 is rendered into pathogenic factor. According to historic development and current trend, such a translation, undoubtedly, is proper and correct.

平发 sudden onset; the rapid appearance of symptoms after contraction

徐发 gradual onset; the gradual appearance of symptoms after contraction

劳复 taxation relapse; relapse of disease due to over-fatigue

In WFCMS Standard, 劳复 is rendered into over fatigue relapse, similar to the translation in WHO Standard. In the current translation practice, 劳复 is also frequently translated as relapse due to overstrain, sounding semantically clearer than taxation relapse or over-fatigue relapse. In fact in WHO Standard, occasionally the same way of translation is also used. The translation of 劳复 is a typical example which is analyzed in the following discussion.

食复 relapse due to dietary irregularity; relapse of disease due to improper diet

In traditional Chinese medicine, 食复 refers to relapse of a disease due to disorder of the digestive and absorptive functions of the stomach and intestines resulting from improper diet during the course of a prolonged illness or after recovery of a serious disease. That is why 食复 is often translated into relapse due to improper diet. Comparatively speaking, improper diet is better than dietary irregularity in revealing the meaning of食复. In some Chinese-English dictionaries of traditional Chinese medicine, 食复 is translated into recurrence of illness due to immoderate diet. To translate 食复 into immoderate diet is also a very good trial.

女劳复 sexual taxation relapse; relapse of disease due to intemperance in sexual activity

女劳复 is often rendered into relapse due to sexual intemperance, which appears concise and clear, much better than sexual taxation relapse. In some other dictionaries, 女劳复 is rendered as a symptom-complex due to excessive sexual intercourse during the convalescence of a disease, an explanatory translation of course, which is certainly correct in meaning, but is too wordy and unpractical.

阴阳离决 dissociation of yin and yang; divorce of yin and yang, indicating the end of life

阴阳失调; 阴阳不和 yin-yang disharmony; a general term for all kinds of pathological changes due to imbalance and in coordination of yin and
yang

To translate 阴阳离决 into dissociation of yin and yang is concise and clear. The same method also can be adopted to translate 阴阳不和 into disharmony of yin and yang which sounds phonetically and looks structurally better than yin-yang disharmony. Besides, 离决 is also frequently translated as separation as done in WFCMS Standard.

阴阳偏盛 abnormal exuberance of yin or yang; any pathological change marked by yin or yang higher than the normal level due to yin pathogens or yang pathogens

阴阳偏衰 abnormal debilitation of yin or yang; any pathological change marked by yin or yang lower than the normal level due to deficiency of yin or yang of the human body

In both international standards, the translation of these two terms is basically the same. However in traditional Chinese medicine, 偏胜 or 偏衰 describes that condition that deviates from the normal state. In this case the character 偏 is used to describe the progress of either yin or yang in contrast to its normal development. For this reason, the English word relative may be an appropriate one to describe 偏. Besides, to modify debilitation with abnormal sounds awkward. Debilitation means weakness due to pathological changes. So debilitation is obviously abnormal.

阴阳首和 spontaneous harmonization of yin and yang; spontaneous recovery from imbalance of yin and yang by its own natural regulatory function, also known as spontaneous restoration of yin-yang equilibrium

阴阳首和 is usually translated as natural harmony of yin and yang, literal translation of course. In fact, 阴阳首和 implies that yin and yang lost their harmonious relation due to pathological changes and now have regained their balance after treatment. That is why some translators in China rendered 阴阳首和 into re-establishment of equilibrium between yin and yang. Semantically speaking, such a translation has revealed the basic meaning of this concept in traditional Chinese medicine. In the West, this concept is rendered as spontaneous harmonization of yin and yang by some translators and natural restoration of the yin-yang balance by some others. The former is a literal translation while the latter is an explanatory translation.

伤 阳 damage to yang; a general term for various kinds of pathological changes marked by impairment of yang qi

伤 阴 damage to yin; a general term for various kinds of pathological changes marked by consumption of yin qi

阳损及阴 detriment to yang affects yin; a pathological change in which weakness of yang qi impedes the generation of yin, resulting in deficiency of both yin and yang with a preponderance of yang deficiency

阴损及阳 detriment to yin affects yang; a pathological change in which consumption of yin weakens yang qi, resulting in deficiency of both yin and yang with a preponderance of yin deficiency

It is acceptable to translate 阳损及阴 and 阴损及阳 into sentences. However, they also can be translated into phrases or terms which sound more natural and are more practical in communication. In WFCMS Standard, for example, 阳损及阴 and 阴损及阳 are translated respectively into yang impairment affecting yin and yin impairment affecting yang. In the current translation field, the Chinese character 及 as 阳损及阴 and 阴损及阳 is often rendered into involving. For instance, 阳损及阴 can be rendered as impairment of yang involving yin while 阴损及阳 can be rendered as impairment of yin involving yang. In English Translation of Common Terms in Traditional Chinese Medicine[4] compiled by Professor Xie Zhufan, 阳损及阴 and 阴损及阳 are respectively rendered as yang impairment with yin involved and yin impairment with yang involved, appealing concise and appropriate.

虚 阴 deficiency; a pathological change marked by deficiency of yin with diminished moistening, calming, downbearing and yang-inhibiting function, leading to relative hyperactivity of yang qi in Kampo medicine, yin and deficiency are independently understood

虚内热 yin deficiency with internal heat; insufficient yin failing to counterbalance yang, causing deficiency-heat to arise internally

虚阳亢 yin deficiency with yang hyperactivity; insufficient essence, blood and fluid failing to restrain yang, causing increased activity of yang

虚火 yin deficiency with effulgent fire; insufficient yin failing to restrain yang, causing embittered fire of deficiency type

虚火 deficiency fire; consumption of yin fluid failing to restrain yang fire, giving rise to fire of the deficiency type

虚火上炎 deficiency fire flaming upward; a pathological change occurring in yin deficiency which is unable to inhibit yang, causing upflaming of the deficiency fire

In the current translation field, 虚 in traditional Chinese medicine is often translated into deficiency, already becoming a common practice.
However, if we make a careful comparison between 虚 and deficiency, we may find that they actually do not correspond to each other in semantics. Twenty years ago, Professor Ou Ming from Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine published an article on English translation of traditional Chinese medical terminologies. In his article, Professor Ou suggested that 虚 in traditional Chinese medicine is profound in connotation and that under different condition and in different context it may mean different things. Generally speaking, the connotations of 虚 may include asthenia, deficiency, insufficiency, weakness, debility, hypofunction, etc. In translation, translators have to render it differently according to the given contexts and cannot always use one single English word to translate. For instance, when 虚 refers to the condition of viscera, it can be rendered into asthenia. Thus 虚 should be translated as asthenia of the spleen. If we put it into deficiency of the spleen, it seems that the spleen is substantially damaged. Take 脾虚泛水 for example. It refers to edema due to dysfunction of the spleen in transporting and transforming water and dampness. For this reason, 脾虚 in this case should be rendered as hypofunction of the spleen. If 虚 just means physically weak, it certainly should be translated as weakness or debility. What Professor Ou Ming suggested twenty years ago was undoubtedly reasonable and correct. However, very unfortunately, the word deficiency is now used much more frequently than any other words in translating 虚. So now we have to accept such a reality and take deficiency as the equivalent of 虚. However, when we talk about concepts like 体虚 (physical weakness) and the expressions like 久病必虚 (prolonged illness causes weakness), weakness is still the best word to translate 虚.

相火 妄动 frenetic stirring of the ministerial fire; deficiency of liver-kidney yin leading to hyperactivity and upsurge of ministerial fire

In traditional Chinese medicine, 君火 is usually rendered as monarch fire. That is why 相火 is translated as ministerial fire. Such translations sound quite awkward, but are generally accepted. 妄动 is sometimes liberally translated as hyperactivity, appearing quite concise, but failing to revealing the implication of the concept. In traditional Chinese medicine, 妄动 means to run about wantonly. In WHO Standard, 妄动 is rendered into frenetic stirring which is certainly a literal translation, but sounds quite expressive.

阳盛 yin exuberance; a pathological state in which yin pathogen is exuberant while the healthy qi has not been damaged, giving rise to an excess cold syndrome, the same as yin excess

阳盛 阳衰 yin exuberance with yang debilitation; exuberant yin cold with resultant debilitation of yang qi, the same as yin excess with yang deficiency

衰 is also frequently translated as decline. In WFCMS Standard, for example, 阳盛 阳衰 is rendered as exuberant yin and declined yang. If changed into exuberance of yin with decline of yang, it may be better in structure because in WFCMS Standard 阳盛 阳衰 is translated as exuberance of yang with decline of yin. In fact 阳盛 阳衰 and 阳盛 阳衰 all imply cause and effect. That is to say decline of yang is caused by exuberance of yin and decline of yin is the result of exuberance of yang. In translating these two concepts, translators have to take such a cause and effect into consideration.

阳虚 yang deficiency; a pathological state characterized by deficiency of body’ s yang qi that leads to diminished functions, decreased metabolic activities, reduced body reactions as well as deficiency cold manifestations; in Kampo medicine, yin and excess are independently understood.

阳虚 阳衰 yang deficiency with yin exuberance; insufficient yang failing to counterbalance yin, resulting in relative exuberance of yin, the same as yang deficiency with yin excess

阳盛 yang exuberance; a pathological state in which yang is exuberant while yin has not been debilitated, giving rise to an excess-heat syndrome, the same as yin excess

阳盛 阳衰 yang exuberance with yin debilitation; a pathological state characterized by simultaneous presence of exuberance of yang and debilitation of yin, also the same as yin excess with yin deficiency

阳盛 阳拒 yin-yang repulsion; a serious pathological state in which extremely excessive yin in the interior forces the asthenic yang to spread outward or extremely exuberant yang in the interior keeps insufficient yin on the outside, forming pseudo-heat or pseudo-cold phenomena

阳盛格阳; 阳格 yin-yang repelling yang; a pathological state in which extremely excessive yin entrenched in the exterior forces the asthenic yang to float on the body surface, leading to pseudo-heat symptoms, the same as excessive yin repelling yang, and also known as repelled yang

阳盛格阳; 阳格 yin exuberant yang repelling yin; a pathological state in which extremely exuberant yang trapped in the interior keeps insufficient yin in the exterior, leading to pseudo-cold symptoms,
the same as excessive yang repelling yin, and also known as repelled yin.

In WHO Standard, two words, repulsion and repelling, are used to translate 格拒. Semantically speaking, both words can be used to translate 格拒 because they are similar to each other in meaning. In traditional Chinese medicine, 格拒 means that yin and yang repel or reject each other. That is why Professor Liu Zhanwen from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine has translated 格拒 into inter-repelling of yin and yang in his Chinese-English Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Besides, to put 阴阳 into yinyang seems to have weakened their intrinsic relationship.

阴阳 upcast yang; a pathological state characterized by exuberant yin cold in the lower part of the body which forces the asthenic yang to stay at the upper surface of the body.

阴阳 refers to a sort of critic condition characterized by true cold in the lower and false heat in the upper due to floating of true yang upwards because of declination of renal essence. This pathological condition is usually marked by unfixed pink coloration of the cheeks. In China, many translators have rendered 阴阳 into floating yang, which often confuses with another concept 阴阳 (floating yang due to deficiency). So comparatively speaking, upcast yang is more practical.

阴阳两虚 dual deficiency of yin and yang; a pathological state characterized by deficiency of both yin and yang.

阴阳两虚 is often translated as deficiency of both yin and yang which sounds smoother than dual deficiency of yin and yang. However, in both international standards, dual deficiency of yin and yang is used to translate 阴阳两虚, indicating that such a translation is also widely used.

虚阳上浮; 孤阳上越 deficiency yang floating upward; a pathological change in which consumption of essence and blood deprives yang of its base, causing yang to float at the upper surface.

亡阴; 亡阳; 亡脱 yin collapse; a pathological change caused by sudden massive loss of fluid leading to collapse.

亡阳; 亡阳; 亡脱 yang collapse; a pathological change where yang qi is suddenly exhausted, resulting in abrupt failure of bodily functions.

阳亡阴脱 collapse of yang and exhaustion of yin; collapse of both yin and yang, indicating the moribund state of a critically ill patient.

阴竭阳脱 exhaustion of yin and collapse of yang; exhaustion of yin fluid and collapse of yang qi with resultant functional failure, indicating that the patient is critically ill.

内闭外脱 internal block and external collapse; a pathological change characterized by depression/stagnation of excessive pathogenic qi in the interior with expulsion of the debilitated original qi.

How to translate 亡 and 脱 in describing yin and yang is still under debate. Partly because 亡 and 脱 are two common Chinese characters which lack necessary technical features. Usually technical terms are, comparatively speaking, easier to be standardized. Literally speaking, 亡 means loss and 脱 means prostration. However in the current translation practice, 亡阳 is often rendered as exhaustion of yang, and 脫阳 is frequently rendered as exhaustion of yin. Sometimes 亡 is also translated into depletion. In traditional Chinese medicine, the character 死 is also used to describe loss of yin, such as 死脱 which is often translated as exhaustion of yin. These Chinese characters, in fact, sometimes overlap with each other in connotation. Besides, 阴脱 and 阳脱 are sometimes also rendered as collapse of yin, collapse of yang. In terms of connotation, 亡阳 and 阳脱 vary in degree, and therefore they should not be simply translated into yin collapse. The same case is also true of 亡阳 and 阳脱.

结阴 binding in yin; pathogenic qi binding in the yin meridians/channels.

结阴 binding in yin; sluggish flow of yang qi in the limbs, leading to retention of water and edema.

The Chinese character 结 in the terms of 结阴 and 结阳 means coagulation or accumulation. Thus to translate 结 into binding seems still in need of further consideration. In WFCMS Standard, 结 is translated into stagnation or stagnancy, sounding much better than binding. In fact in the current translation practice, many translators use the word stagnation or stagnancy to translate 结. Such a tendency has to be taken into consideration in standardizing the English translation of traditional Chinese medical terminologies.

表里 exterior and interior; 1) the outer part of the body (the skin, body hair, flesh and superficial meridians/channels) and the inner part of the body (the bowels and visceræ, qi, blood, and bone marrow); 2) two of the eight principles of pattern identification/syndrome differentiation, indicating the depth of penetration of external pathogens.

半表半里 half-exterior half-interior; location between the exterior and the interior.

In the early period of translation, 半表半里 was often translated as half-superficies and half-interior, appearing unbalanced in structure. That is why it was gradually replaced by half-exterior.
and half-interior. 半表半里 sometimes is also rendered as semi-exterior and semi-interior as is done in both international standards.

表寒 exterior cold; attack on the exterior part of the body by wind-cold, chiefly manifested by severe aversion to wind and cold, headache and stiff neck, soreness of the limbs and joints, thin white coating of the tongue and floating tense pulse

表热 exterior heat; attack on the exterior part of the body by wind-heat, chiefly manifested by slight aversion to wind and cold, moderate fever, headache, slight thirst, thin white or thin yellowish coating of the tongue, or red tip of the tongue and floating rapid pulse

表虚 exterior deficiency; deficiency of defense qi in the superficial part of the body, marked by spontaneous sweating or sweating accompanied by aversion to wind and floating feeble pulse

表实 exterior excess; invasion of external pathogens that causes gathering of defense qi in the skin and flesh and blockage of the interstices and pores marked by absence of sweating, chills and a floating forceful pulse

里寒 interior cold; a pathological state characterized by preponderance of yin cold or decline of yang qi in the interior

里热 interior heat; a pathological state characterized by heat in the interior, either due to exuberance of pathogenic heat or due to yin deficiency with endogenous heat

里虚 interior deficiency; a general term for deficiency of qi, blood, yin and yang of the internal organs

里实 interior excess; 1) a pathological change resulting from an external pathogen transforming into heat and entering the interior to bind in the stomach and intestines; 2) a general term denoting accumulation of pathological products in the body, such as phlegm, retained fluid, stagnant qi and blood, intestinal parasites, and undigested food

Just as the case of 虚, the English translation of 实 was not unified for a quite long time. In the same article 写 by Professor Ou Ming, it has pointed out that 实 refers to exuberance of pathogenic factors with a series of severe manifestations. For reason, Professor Ou has suggested to translate 实 into sthenia and 虚 into asthenia. What Professor Ou has suggested is undoubtedly correct and practical. Unfortunately, 虚 and 实 are now frequently translated into deficiency and excess which are almost taken as the standardized translations of 虚 and 实. Today very few people are still using asthenia and sthenia to translate 虚 and 实. Such a development is quite significant in linguistics, indicating that languages, though constantly under the manipulation of human beings, also develop in their own way.

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