Comparative study on WHO Western Pacific Region and
World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies international
standard terminologies on traditional medicine: Syndrome
Differentiation of Stomach and Intestinal Diseases

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The stomach is located in the middle region of Sanjiao. It is responsible for reception and primary digestion of water and food, and therefore taken as the postnatal base of life in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Physiologically, the stomach is closely related to the intestines that receive and further digest the water and food which had been primarily digested in the stomach. The concepts and terms related to the stomach and intestines are usually concrete and specific in connotation and therefore easy to be translated. The methods adopted to translate these concepts and terms in the current translation practice are basically the same, making it much easier for international standardization.

胃病辨证 gastrointestinal pattern identification/
syndrome differentiation: visceral pattern identifi-
cation/syndrome differentiation dealing with diseases of the stomach and intestines

In developing International Classification of Traditional Medicine (ICTM), WHO emphasizes the necessity to avoid the use of Western medicine terminologies in translating traditional medicine terminologies. In TCM, for instance, there are specialties known as internal medicine and gynecology, but WHO suggests changing “internal medicine”
and “gynecology” in TCM into “internal traditional medicine” and “woman disease study”. This suggestion sounds unfair but it has to be followed in the construction of ICTM. According to WHO’s suggestion, it seems that “gastrointestinal” also cannot be used here because it sounds too modern and too westernized.

胃气虚证 stomach deficiency pattern/syndrome: a collective term for various deficiency patterns/syndromes of the stomach, including deficiency of stomach qi, yang and yin

胃气虚证 stomach qi deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by dull epigastric pain relieved by pressure, anorexia, pale tongue and weak pulse

In the definition of 胃气虚证, the term “anorexia” may be the translation of the Chinese term 纳呆 which is rendered as torpid intake in the part of Diagnosis in WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region[1] (abbreviated as WPRO Standard). The Chinese term 纳呆 means poor appetite or anorexia caused by deficiency of stomach and intestinal qi and internal retention of dampness and turbid substance. Obviously anorexia or poor appetite is the best equivalent to 纳呆. To translate it as “torpid intake” is difficult to understand because torpid means inactive, slow, lazy or lacking in strength. Torpid intake seems to mean slow taking of food. But the Chinese term 纳呆 means no appetite. The phrase “pale tongue” in the definition seems to be the translation of the Chinese term 舌淡 which actually means light-colored tongue, not so serious as “pale”.

胃寒证: stomach cold pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to insufficiency of yang qi to warm the stomach and marked by continuous epigastric pain, ameliorated by warmth and pressure, reduced food intake, stiffness sensation in the stomach, aversion to cold with cold limbs, pale tongue with whitish coating and sunken slow weak pulse

The Chinese terms 胃寒证 and 胃实寒证 are quite similar to each other in meaning. However, they are two independent terms and thus need to be translated separately for the sake of distinction. According to the structure and connotation, they can be translated respectively as “stomach yang deficiency pattern/syndrome” and “stomach deficiency cold pattern/syndrome”. In the definition, the phrase “reduced food intake” may be the translation of the Chinese term 食欲不振 which is also frequently translated as “poor appetite”.

胃阴虚证: stomach yin deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to insufficiency of yin fluid to moisten the stomach and marked by dryness in the mouth, thirst, anorexia, constipation, retching and reddened peeled tongue

The Chinese term 胃阴虚证 and 胃实寒证 are similar to each other in meaning. However, they are two separate terms and need to be translated separately for the sake of distinction. Careful analysis shows that these two terms actually bear certain semantic differences. For instance, 胃阴虚证 describes the result of stomach yin that has become deficient while 胃阴虚证 seems to describe the process in which stomach yin gradually becomes deficient. Besides, in 胃实寒证, the Chinese characters 寒 and 寒 seem to bear a cause-and-effect relationship. The character 寒 shows the process of reduction while the character 寒 indicates the result of such a continuous reduction process. In WPRO Standard[1], the Chinese character 寒 is translated as “depletion” while 寒 is rendered as “deficiency”. According to such a distinctive translation, it seems quite appropriate to translate the term 胃阴虚证 as “pattern/syndrome of stomach yin depletion-deficiency” or “stomach yin depletion-deficiency pattern/syndrome”.

胃寒证: stomach cold pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome of stomach cold, either of excess type or of deficiency type

Stomach cold pattern/syndrome, just as mentioned in the definition, includes both stomach deficiency-cold pattern/syndrome and stomach excess-cold pattern/syndrome. The former is caused by cold pathogen from the internal while the latter is caused by cold pathogen from the external.

胃实寒证: stomach excess cold pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome arising when the stomach is attacked by pathogenic cold, usually manifested by acute severe epigastric pain with cold sensation, vomiting of watery fluid, aversion to cold with cold limbs and white tongue coating

When the Chinese phrase 实寒 in the term of 胃实寒证 is translated as “excess cold”, it is necessary to use a hyphen between the “excess” and “cold”. In the definition, the phrase “pathogenic cold” is certainly the translation of the Chinese term 寒邪. The Chinese character 邪 is also translated as “pathogen” in WPRO Standard[1]. In the current translation practice, 邪 is also frequently translated as “pathogenic factors”. Sometimes translators also use the English word “evil” to render 邪.
Semantically speaking, “pathogenic factor” sounds much more natural than “pathogen”. However, “pathogen” obviously appears more concise, that is why it is now used more and more frequently. Sometimes, 邪 is also rendered as “evil” which does not sound like a medical term.

胃热证; 胃火证; 胃热壅盛证; 胃火炽盛证 stomach heat pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome due to impairment of the stomach by pathogenic heat or caused by overeating of hot pungent food, mainly manifested by thirst, foul breath, hyperesthesia, oliguria with dark urine, constipation, and ulceration of the mouth or gingivitis, reddened tongue with yellow coating and rapid pulse, the same as the (intense) stomach fire pattern/syndrome.

Just as analyzed above about 胃阳虚证 and 胃虚寒证, the Chinese terms 胃热证, 胃火证, 胃热壅盛证 and 胃火炽盛证 are four separate terms and need to be translated separately for the convenience of comprehension. In the Chinese language, 火 and 热 are obviously two different concepts, though they are closely related to each other. To make a distinction between these two concepts, we can say that “fire” is the extreme development of “heat” while “heat” is the primary progress of “fire”. The so-called 胃热证 certainly can be translated as “stomach heat pattern/syndrome”.

And for 胃火证, “stomach fire pattern/syndrome” is obviously the proper translation of it. As to 胃热壅盛证 and 胃火炽盛证, it is undoubtedly necessary to translate them separately because they bear certain difference in connotation. In WPRO Standard^{11}, the Chinese characters 壅 and 炽 are respectively translated as “congestion”, “exuberance” and “intense”, basically similar to the current translation practice. According to the formula of translation adopted by WPRO Standard^{11}, 胃热壅盛证 and 胃火炽盛证 may be reasonably and respectively translated as “congesting-exuberant stomach heat pattern/syndrome” or “pattern/syndrome of congesting-exuberant stomach heat” and “intense-exuberant stomach fire pattern/syndrome” or “pattern/syndrome of intense-exuberant stomach fire”.

瘀阻胃络证 pattern/syndrome of (blood) stasis in the stomach collateral: a pattern/syndrome arising when static blood obstructs the stomach collateral, marked by epigastric stabbing pain that is aggravated by pressure or palpable mass in the epigastric region, or vomiting of dark-colored blood with clots, purple spots on the tongue and string-like choppy pulse.

The Chinese character 瘀 in 瘀阻胃络证 is translated as “stasis” or “stagnation” in the current translation practice. In TCM, 瘀 usually means that the blood does not flow as smoothly or as vigorously as it usually does. However, such a sense about the state of blood is really difficult to be truly expressed in the translation. Perhaps that is why some translators tend to use “stagnation” to translate 瘀 in TCM. However, “stagnation” is still not quite equivalent to 瘀 in TCM. This example shows that it is really difficult to exactly express the real implication of a TCM term by English translation. In the definition, “static blood” may be another way to translate 瘀. The phrase “palpable mass” may be the translation of the Chinese term 瘀痕 which is often translated as “abdominal mass” or “mass”. However, in TCM, 瘀痕 is either palpable or non-palpable. Sometimes it is not palpable, but still sensible. That is why the patient feels uncomfortable. In the phrase “string-like choppy pulse”, “string-like” is easy to understand and obviously refers to the Chinese term 脉弦. But what does the word “choppy” refers to? It may refer to either 泫 (flooding pulse) or 数 (rapid pulse). But “choppy” in English also means “irregular”. In TCM, several states of pulse may appear to be irregular.

肠燥津亏证; 肠燥津伤证 pattern/syndrome of intestinal dryness and fluid depletion: a pattern/syndrome marked by dry feces difficult to evacuate, infrequent bowel movement, abdominal distension and pain, or palpable mass in the lower abdomen, thirst, reddened tongue with scanty moisture and yellow dry coating, and string-like choppy pulse.

In TCM, 肠燥津亏证 and 肠燥津伤证 are similar to each other. However, they are two independent terms and thus need to be translated separately. In WPRO Standard^{11}, the Chinese characters 亏 and 伤 are respectively translated as “depletion” and “damage”. In view of such a distinction, 肠燥津伤证 can be translated as “pattern/syndrome of intestinal dryness and fluid damage”. In International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies^{21} (abbreviated as WFcms Standard), the Chinese character 亏 is translated as “consumption”. That is why the Chinese term 肠燥津亏证 is translated as “syndrome/pattern of intestinal dryness and fluid consumption” in WFcms Standard. In the definition, “infrequent bowel movement” may be
the translation of the Chinese term 排便不畅 which is also rendered as “inhibited defecation”.

血虚肠燥证 pattern/syndrome of blood deficiency and intestinal dryness: a pattern/syndrome caused by deficiency of blood depriving the intestines of moisture, and marked by dry stool difficult to defecate or accompanied by hematochezia, pale complexion and tongue, and fine choppy pulse.

The TCM term 血虚肠燥 bears a cause-and-effect relationship, indicating that 肠燥 is caused by 血虚. According to such an analysis, 血虚肠燥证 may be reasonably rendered as “pattern/syndrome of blood deficiency with intestinal dryness” or “pattern/syndrome of intestinal dryness due to blood deficiency”. In the definition, the term “hematochezia” refers to bloody stool or blood in the stool. In WHO/ICTM project, Western medical terms are forbidden to be used in the translation of traditional medical terminologies.

寒滞胃肠证 pattern/syndrome of cold stagnating in stomach and intestines: a pattern/syndrome arising when pathogenic cold invades the gastrointestinal tract and gives rise to disordered transmission and transformation, usually manifested by sudden pain in the epigastric region and abdomen aggravated by cold and alleviated by warmth, nausea, vomiting, bland taste in the mouth with no thirst, watery diarrhea, aversion to cold with cold limbs, white tongue coating and string-like tight pulse.

In the Chinese term 寒滞胃肠证, the Chinese character 滞 sounds like a verb. Maybe that is why 寒滞胃肠 is translated as “cold stagnating in the stomach and intestines”. Currently, 寒滞 is also translated as “cold stagnation”, but such a translation appears static and thus failing to express the dynamic state of cold that is gradually stagnating in the stomach and intestines. Comparatively speaking, “cold stagnating” sounds better than “cold stagnation”. In the definition, the phrase “disordered transmission and transformation” may be the translation of the Chinese term 传导失司 in which there may just involve the activities of transmission and transportation, without the involvement of transformation. The phrase “string-like tight pulse” may be the translation of the Chinese term 弦紧 or 弦紧 are also frequently translated as “taut” and “tense”, respectively.

肠湿湿热证 intestinal dampness-heat pattern/syndrome: a syndrome marked by discharge of purulent and bloody stools, accompanied by abdominal pain, tenesmus, scanty dark urine, yellow and slimy tongue coating, and rapid slippery pulse.

In the definition of this term, the phrase “discharge of purulent and bloody stools” may be the translation of the Chinese term 下痢脓血 or 便后脓血 which is caused by retention of pestilence in the bowels that blocks qi activity and injures the intestinal vessels with the clinical manifestations of abdominal pain, tenesmus and diarrhea with blood and pus. The phrase “slimy tongue coating” may be the translation of the Chinese term 苔腻 which is also frequently translated as “greasy tongue coating”.

肠热腑实证 pattern/syndrome of intestinal heat and bowel excess: a pattern/syndrome marked by high fever or late afternoon fever, abdominal fullness, pain, tenderness and refusal of pressure, constipation or heat bind with circumfluence, thirst, or impaired consciousness and delirium, short voidings of reddish urine, reddened tongue with thick yellow and dry coating, and sunken rapid forceful pulse.

To translate the Chinese concept 腹 as “bowel” is certainly inaccurate because “bowel” is just one part of 腹 which still includes the stomach, bladder, gallbladder and uterus. According to the agreement reached at WHO’s meeting on ICTM held in Tokyo in December 2010, the Chinese concept 腹 should be transliterated as “Zangfu”. Thus the 腹 in this term should be transliterated as “Fu” instead of “bowels”. In this definition, the phrase “tenderness and refusal of pressure” may be the translation of the Chinese term 疼痛拒按 which is sometimes translated as “unpalpable pain”. Comparatively speaking, “tenderness and refusal of pressure” sounds better than “unpalpable pain”. If “tenderness and refusal of pressure” is changed into “tenderness with refusal of pressure”, it may sound more reasonably. The phrase “heat bind with circumfluence” may be the translation of the Chinese term 热结旁流 which is also frequently translated as “heat retention with watery discharge”. The Chinese phrase 旁流 means that the stool discharged is as sloppy as water because of heat retention in the intestines. Thus, to translate it as “circumfluence” seems inexpressive. The phrase “impaired consciousness” may be the translation of the Chinese term 神昏 which means unconsciousness or even coma.

In WFCMS Standard[21], the term 腹热腑实证 is translated as “syndrome/pattern of intestinal heat and fu-organ excess”, similar to the current trans-
loration practice.

胃气停滞证 gastrointestinal qi stagnation pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by epigastric and abdominal distending pain or moving pain, belching, borborygmi alleviated by the passing of flatus, nausea, ungratifying diarrhea, thick tongue coating and string-like pulse

In the definition of this term, the phrase “moving pain” may be the translation of the Chinese term 游走性疼痛 which is frequently translated as “migratory pain” or “wandering pain”. The phrase “ungratifying diarrhea” may be the translation of the Chinese term 溏泻不畅 which means inhibited diarrhea or diarrhea that is not discharged smoothly. To translate it as “ungratifying diarrhea” sounds vivid, but inaccurate.

阴虚动风证 pattern/syndrome of yin deficiency with stirring wind: a pattern/syndrome arising when deficiency of yin fluid deprives the meridians/channels of nourishment and stirs up the internal wind, marked by twitching of extremities, accompanied by dizziness, tinnitus, flushed cheeks and dry reddened tongue

In the definition of this term, the phrase “twitching of extremities” may be the translation of the Chinese term 四肢震颤 which is frequently translated as “tremor of extremities” or “tremor of limbs”. It seems that “twitching” is lighter than “tremor”. But sometimes they seem to be similar to each other. Maybe the only difference lies in the causes. “Twitching” may be a physiological reaction while “tremor” is often a pathological change. In the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English\(^1\), “tremor” is defined as “a small earthquake in which the ground shakes slightly: an earth tremor” or “a slight shaking movement in your body that you cannot control, especially because you are ill, weak, or upset”; while “twitch” is defined as “if a part of someone’s body twitches, or if they twitch it, it makes a small sudden movement: His mouth twitched slightly, and then he smiled.” In TCM, there is a term called 搐 which is often translated as “twitching” because it refers to an involuntary movement with slight spasmodic jerks of different parts of the body.

饮留胃肠证 pattern/syndrome of fluid retention in the stomach and intestines: a pattern/syndrome caused by retention of fluid in the stomach and intestines, and marked by epigastric distension and fullness with splashing sounds in the stomach, rumbling noises in the intestines, bland taste in the mouth with no thirst, white and slimy tongue coating, and sunken slippery pulse

In the definition of this term, the phrase “splashing sounds in the stomach, rumbling noises in the intestines” may be the translation of the Chinese term 胃肠辘辘漉漉 which is often simply translated as “borborygmus”. Comparatively speaking, the translation in WPRO Standard\(^1\) is better and more vivid than “borborygmus” in expressing the idea implied in the original Chinese term.

虫积肠道证 pattern/syndrome of worms accumulating in the intestines: a pattern/syndrome attributed to intestinal parasitosis, especially ascariasis, and marked by paroxysms of abdominal pain, sometimes accompanied by mass formation or discharge of ascaris with stool, grinding of teeth during sleep, or appearance of white miliary spots on the inside of the lips

The Chinese term 虫积 in 虫积肠道证 is usually translated as “parasitic infestation” or “helminthic accumulation”. However, “worms accumulating” also sounds reasonable and understandable. In the definition, several Western medicine terms such as parasitosis, ascariasis and ascaris are used, which are forbidden in WHO/ICTM. Clinical manifestations of this pattern/syndrome also include apousic appetite, emaciation, or parasite in the stool.

大肠津亏证 large intestinal fluid deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by constipation or difficulty in defecation accompanied by dry throat and reddened tongue with scanty coating

In WPRO Standard\(^1\), the Chinese concept 亏 is translated as “depletion”. But in this term the same concept is rendered as “deficiency”, failing to maintain a consistency in term translation. In WFCMS Standard\(^2\), 亏 is rendered as “consumption” which looks confusing because the Chinese concept 耗 in TCM means “consumption”. In some other terms in WFCMS Standard\(^2\), 亏 is also rendered as “insufficiency”. For instance, the Chinese term 大肠液亏 is rendered as “liquid insufficiency of large intestine”, also failing to maintain a consistency in term translation.

大肠热结证 large intestinal heat bind pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by constipation with abdominal pain and tenderness, yellow and dry coating of the tongue, and sunken forceful pulse

The Chinese character 结 in 大肠热结证 is also
frequently translated as “retention”. For instance, 大肠热结 is quite often translated as “heat retention in the large intestine”. However, in the West, some translators insist on translating 结 as “bind”, which sounds reasonable but is not used as frequently as “retention”. Sometimes 结 is also translated as “accumulation”. In WFCMS Standard[21], for instance, 大肠热结 is translated as “large intestine heat accumulation”.

大肠湿热证 large intestinal dampness-heat pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by discharge of purulent and bloody stools, abdominal pain, tenesmus, scanty dark urine, yellow and slimy tongue coating, and rapid slippery pulse

This pattern/syndrome is often caused by internal accumulation of dampness-heat that damages the intestinal collaterals and blocks qi movement. In the definition, the phrase “dark urine” may refer to the Chinese term 小便黄赤 which is also frequently translated as “deep-colored urine”.

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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：胃肠病辨证

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关键词：语言学；科学术语；翻译；英语；中医名词；胃肠病辨证