English Translation of TCM

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

Zhao-guo Li
1. College of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai 200234, China
2. Secretariat of Translation Specialty Committee, World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, Shanghai 200234, China

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The diseases in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) gynecology are usually related to menstruation, leucorrhea, pregnancy and psychology. About 69 terms are included in the WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region[1] (abbreviated as the WPRO Standard[1], and 177 in the International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies[2] (abbreviated as the WFCMS Standard[2]). The following is a brief study about how to understand and translate these terms according to explanations in A Concise Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine[3] and the studies made in the book entitled International Standardization of English Translation of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Study of Theory, Summarization of Practice and Exploration of Methods[4].

并月 bimonthly menstruation: menstruation occurring once every two months, but causing no symptoms

This term was first used in the chapter about the principles for treating woman diseases in the book entitled Golden Mirror of Medicine (Yizong Jinjian, 《医宗金鉴》) compiled by Wu Qian (吴谦) who was an imperial doctor in the Qing Dynasty (1644AD-1912AD).

居经；季经 trimonthly menstruation: menstruation occurring once every three months, but causing no symptoms

This term, also known as 按季, was first used in the book entitled Canon of Pulse (Maijing, 《脉经》) written by Wang Shuhe (王叔和) in the West Jin Dynasty (265AD-316AD). This term is also translated as “seasonal menstruation”, which is adopted in the WFCMS Standard.

避年 annual menstruation: menstruation occurring once a year, but causing no symptoms

This term was first used in the book entitled Canon of Pulse. Annual menstruation, though a physiological phenomenon, is seldom encountered in clinical practice.

五不女 five unwomanlinesses: five forms of female infertility

The so-called 五不女, refers to five types of female infertility caused by congenital malformations or acquired dysfunction of female genital organs, including spiral lines on the vagina, atresia or stricture of the vagina, imperforated
hymen, clitorism and primary amenorrhea. This term was first used in the book entitled Records about Reproduction (Guangsi Jiyaoy, 《广嗣纪要》) compiled by Wan Quan (万全) in the Ming Dynasty (1364AD-1683AD). To translate "五不女" as "five unwomanlinesses" appears similar to the original term in Chinese, but sounds unclear.

The so-called 产 is a modern term about the process of giving birth to offsprings. In TCM, this process is usually called 临盆 (about to labor) or 分娩 (to labor). In some other ancient Chinese classics, 分娩, 分诞, 免身 and 免产 are also used to describe such a process.

The so-called 试胎 or 试月 refers to abdominal pain that occurs for a short time and then stops, occurring during the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy.

The so-called 弄胎 or 弄产 refers to abdominal pain that occurs for a period of short time and then stops automatically during pregnancy. To translate it as "testing labor", though appearing quite similar to the original term in structure, is confusing in meaning. In some Chinese-English dictionaries, this term is translated as "pregnancy test", sounding like a modern clinical test.

In TCM, the so-called false labor is usually described as 弄胎 which means increased movement of fetus that occurs in the third trimester of pregnancy, but not accompanied with other signs of delivery. In the book entitled Supplement to Reproduction Studies (Xu Guangdasheng Pian, 《续广达生篇》) compiled by Zhou Dengyong (周登庸), it says, "the so-called 弄胎 refers to increased movement of fetus in two or three days after six or seven, or eight and nine months of pregnancy without backache, abnormal changes of pulse and any signs of labor."

试水 early leakage of amniotic fluid: the condition characterized by leakage of the amniotic fluid which is not followed by childbirth.

伤产 injured labor: premature delivery due to traumatic injury.

产褥 puerperium: the period between childbirth and the return of the uterus to its normal condition.

In TCM, the so-called 产褥 refers to the period before, during and after childbirth. This term is often used together with other characters or terms to describe different conditions or diseases during such a period, such as 产褥病 (puerperalism), 产褥感染 (puerperal infection), 产褥出血 (puerperal hemorrhage), 产褥热 (puerperal fever) and 产褥中暑 (puerperal heatstroke), etc.

月经病 menstrual disease: a collective term for diseases characterized by abnormal interval, duration, quantity, color, quality of menses, non-physiological stoppage, as well as symptoms within the periods or around menopause, the same as emmeniopathy.

In the translation field, "menopathy" is also used to translate 月经病. However it sounds too modern. A few years ago, technical terms from modern medicine were often borrowed to translate the concerned TCM terms in order to make it easier for Westerners to understand TCM. But now in the translation field, such a way of translation is used less frequently than before in order to maintain the traditional features of TCM.

月经不调 menstrual irregularities: a general term for irregular menstruation and other menstrual complaints, such as abnormal duration, amount, color and quality of menstrual discharge.

The term 月经不调 is also frequently translated as "menstrual disorder", "irregular menstruation", "irregular menses" or "menoxenia" in other Chinese-English dictionaries of TCM. Comparatively speaking, "irregular menstruation" is used more often in the current translation practice.

月经先期; 经行先期; 经早 advanced menstruation: periods that come one week or more ahead of due time, for more than two successive periods.

As a menstrual disorder, 经行先期 is classified into different patterns according to the causes, such as advanced menstruation due to blood heat (血热经行先期), advanced menstruation due to qi deficiency (气虚经行先期) and advanced menstruation due to liver depression (肝郁经行先期), etc. This term is translated as "preceded menstrual cycle" in the Chinese-English Dictionary of TCM published in the 1980s and compiled by Professor Ou Ming (欧明) who compiled the first dictionary on English translation of TCM terms in the 1970s.

月经后期; 经行后期; 经迟 delayed menstruation: periods that come one week or more after due time, for more than two successive periods.

In TCM, 经行后期, used more often than 月经后期 and 经迟, is often classified into different patterns, such as delayed menstruation due to blood deficiency (血虚经行后期), delayed menstruation due to blood cold (血寒经行后期), delayed menstruation due to kidney deficiency (肾虚经行后期), delayed menstruation due to qi deficiency (气虚经行后期) and delayed menstruation due to blood stagnation (血瘀经行后期), etc.

月经先后无定期; 经乱 menstruation at irregular intervals: periods that come with an irregular cycle, more than one
week early or later
The term **月经过少** is also known as **经行先后无定期, 经水先后无定期, and 经行或前或后**, often caused by liver depression, or kidney deficiency. If caused by liver depression, it is often accompanied by mental depression, discomfort of the breasts, distension and pain in the lower abdomen, more or less menes. Such a problem can be treated by soothing the liver and relieving depression. If caused by kidney deficiency, it is often accompanied by vertigo, tinnitus, sore waist and knees, frequent discharge of urine in the night, sloppy stool, gray complexion and scanty menses. Such a problem can be treated by tonifying the kidney and warming yang. In the WFCMS Standard, this term is translated as “irregular menstrual cycle”.

**月经过少**; **月经过多**; **月水过多**; **月经过少**; **月水过多**; **月水过少**; **月水过多**

In TCM, **月经过少** is usually caused by blood deficiency, blood cold, blood stagnation, phlegm dampness and kidney deficiency. It is also characterized by period of menstrual discharge shorter than usual.

**月经过多**; **经水过多**; **血崩**: sudden onset of profuse uterine bleeding, occurring not in the regular menstruation period, the same as metrorrhagia

In TCM, **月经过多** is usually caused by weakness of the thoroughfare vessel (**冲脉**) and conception vessel (**任脉**) due to qi deficiency, blood heat or overstrain. In the WFCMS Standard, this term is translated as “hypermenorrhea” and “menorrhagia”. Comparatively speaking, “profuse menstruation” is now used more often in order to avoid loan words from modern medicine.

**崩漏 flooding and spotting**: sudden onset of profuse uterine bleeding or incessant dripping of blood, occurring not in the regular menstruation period, the same as metrorrhagia

In TCM, **崩漏** means sudden profuse bleeding and **崩漏** means dripping bleeding not in the cycle of menstruation, often occurring among women during puberty and menopause, usually caused by weakness of the thoroughfare vessel (**冲脉**) and conception vessel (**任脉**). Clinically it is classified into patterns of blood heat, qi deficiency, yin deficiency in the liver and kidney, and blood stagnation. In the past **崩漏** was usually translated as “metorrhagia”. Later on it was changed into “metorrhagia and metrostaxis”. Such a way of translation is now still frequently used and is also adopted in the WFCMS Standard. The so-called “flooding and spotting”, a way of translation used by some translators in the West, sounds similar to the original term in structure, but is less frequently used in the current translation practice.

**崩漏 flooding and spotting**: sudden onset of profuse uterine bleeding or incessant dripping of blood, occurring not in the regular menstruation period, the same as metrorrhagia

In TCM, the so-called **崩漏** or **崩中** is similar to **崩中** (metorrhagia and metrostaxis) in meaning.

That is why it is often translated as “metrorrhagia” or “metrorrhagia and metrostaxis”.

**崩中 spotting**: slight but persistent leakage of blood from the uterus, the same as metrostaxis

The so-called **崩中**, actually seldom used in TCM practice, is in fact similar to **崩中** (metorrhagia, or metorrhagia and metrostaxis) in meaning.

**经期延长 prolonged menstruation**: excessively prolonged menstruation in regular cycles, the same as menostaxis

**经间期出血 intermenstrual bleeding**: uterine bleeding occurring not in the regular menstruation period

**闭经, 经闭 amenorrhea**: failure of menstruation to occur at puberty or abnormal stoppage of the menses for more than three months after menarche

The term **闭经** is first used in the book entitled *Excellent Formulae for Women (Furen Daquan Liangfang), 妇人大全良方*, also known as *《妇人大全良方集要》 and《妇人良方》* compiled by Chen Ziming (陈自明) and published in 1237, which is composed of 24 volumes and 260 chapters. In TCM, this problem, often accompanied by clinical symptoms, is caused by blood depletion, blood exhaustion, kidney deficiency, qi stagnation, blood stasis and stagnation of cold and dampness.

**痛经, 月经痛; 经行腹痛 dysmenorrhea: lower abdominal pain or referring pain to the lower back occurring around or during the menstrual period**

Clinically this problem is classified into different patterns, including dysmenorrheal due to qi deficiency (**气虚痛经**), dysmenorrhea due to blood stagnation (**血瘀痛经**), dysmenorrhea due to stagnation of cold dampness (**寒湿凝滞痛经**), dysmenorrhea due to weakness and deficiency of qi and blood (**气血虚弱痛经**), etc.

**倒经, 逆经 inverted menstruation**: discharge of blood from some part other than the vagina during the menstrual period, such as bleeding from the nose or vomiting of blood

In the WFCMS Standard, **逆经** is translated as “vicarious menorrhagia” while **倒经** is translated as “vicarious menstruation”, which are the terms used in modern medicine. To translate it as “inverted menstruation” appears similar to the original term in structure.

**经行乳房胀痛 distending pain in the breasts during menstruation: distention or sensation of fullness and pain in the breasts before, during, or after menstruation**

In the WFCMS Standard, **经行乳房胀痛** is translated as “menstrual distending pain of breasts”, appearing simpler than that in the WPRO Standard. In the current translation practice, it is also translated as “distending breast pain during menstruation”, which sounds more reasonable in expressing the meaning of the original term.

**经行情志异常 moodiness during menstruation: depression, gloominess, irritability and other changes of mood occurring around each menstrual period and returning to normal after
the period

The so-called 经行情志异常 is actually a modern term in TCM. In the WFCMS Standard, it is translated as “menstrual mental disorder”. To translate it as “moodiness during menstruation” seems to be more practical in expressing the implication of the original term.

REFERENCES

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