

China English Features in Chinese Medicine Translation – Discussion on Translation of Book Titles of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Abstract: Because of its distinctive Chinese characteristics, Chinese medicine is considered as one of the typical symbols of China and it has gradually become a concern in China English study. The classic works of traditional Chinese medicine embody the theoretical frame and ideological basis of the formation and development of Chinese medicine. Their book titles always deliver medical themes in the books. Appropriate translation of them can help improve the spread and communication of Chinese medicine. The paper selects some examples of title translation from recent researches and WHO (World Health Organization) International Standard Terminologies (2007) and analyzes their China English features at cultural and linguistic levels. Through analysis it can be concluded that loanwords and loan translation are two major means applied in the book title translation of traditional Chinese medicine.

Key Words: China English features, translation, book title, Chinese medicine

1. Introduction:

English has become the most widely studied language in China since 1974 (Zhou & Feng, 1987). Embedded in the boundary of Chinese culture, English is inevitably “characterized by a number of linguistic and cultural norms derived from Chinese” (Kirkpatrick & Xu 2002 p. 269). China English has been gradually accepted as a variety of English. With the development of China’s foreign exchange of politics, economy, culture and so on, China English has been gained increasing attention and emerged into the category of World Englishes.

Similarly, being a very unique and typical symbol of Chinese culture and ideology, Chinese medicine plays a significant role in the course of China’s entry to the whole world. Translation as an important channel has been more and more concerned in the foreign exchange of Chinese medicine. Under the guidance of China English, translation of Chinese medicine can help communicate and spread Chinese medicine with and to the outside world and exhibit its national characteristics as a Chinese tradition.

The paper mainly discusses the features of China English in the book title translation for some classic works of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which can be regarded as the most precious part of Chinese medicine descending from the ancient time. They are the treasures of China. Proper translation of their titles can help popularize and publicize TCM classics and philosophy. The paper tries to discuss the cultural and linguistic features in their translation from the perspective of China English.

2. Literature Review

As an international language, English is used in every part of the world. Language contact brings about linguistic interinfluence (Zhou & Feng 1987) and English “went through a reincarnation which was partly linguistic and partly cultural” (Kachru 1982 p. 5). Such reincarnation or variation of language is called “nativization”, With the nativization of English came a branch of study--- World Englishes. In the past thirty years of reform and open to the outside world in China, English has been a very important means in the communication with foreign countries. China English by degrees becomes a major and powerful variety in World Englishes.

China English was first designated by a Chinese scholar, Ge Chuanjia, in 1980. He pointed out China English principally refers to the English words expressing particular Chinese events (Jiang & Shi 2007). One of the most quoted writers on China English is Li Wenzhong, whose definition has been used by plenty of successful researchers. Kirkpatrick and Xu (2002 p. 269) quote Li 's definition of China English : China English is based on a standard English, expresses Chinese culture, has Chinese characteristics in lexis, sentence structure and discourse but does not show any L1 interference.

China English has increasingly drawn researchers' eye in China, the area mainly focusing on Chinese to English translation. Searching from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) , more than 200 articles about translation and China English have been found, but only two of them involve Chinese medicine translation. One explores translation of Chinese medicine with China English at a theoretical level, and the other interprets China English in lexical translation and English teaching of Chinese medicine. None of them is associated with book title translation. It can be seen the study on Chinese medical translation with China English is at a very initial stage. Chinese medicine contains pure Chinese elements and characters, whose translation hardly finds equivalence in its target language. Many Chinese scholars encourage using China English in translation of typically Chinese-characterized matters, such as Chinese ancient poems, Chinese political and economic terms, Chinese cultural classics, Chinese websites, Chinese national and local custom, Chinese films, China's foreign affair, certainly, Chinese medicine, and so on. Jin Huikang's (2002) study on translation of Chinese ancient poem in China English may be considered as an important inspiration on Chinese medicine translation. He thinks transcribing Chinese ancient poetry in China English can reflect the beauty of artistic conception and figures of speech of the poem in more extent. This is the same for the TCM translation.

3. Translation of Chinese medicine

Although few current researches of Chinese medicine translation are related with China English, the translation study of Chinese medicine in other aspects thrives significantly. Thirty years endeavor in standardizing English translation of Chinese medical terminology has witnessed the prosperous development in Chinese medicine translation. Standardization of terminology viewed as a grand project in the translation of Chinese medicine has established the basis to realize the modernization and internationalization of Chinese medicine. Many outstanding scholars from China and foreign countries were

committed to this project. The process has seen the gradual formation of two translation schools of Chinese medicine. One is source-oriented, represented by Nigel Wiseman who has translated *Fundamentals of Chinese Medicine (ZhongYi Xue Ji Chu)* and whose *A practical Dictionary of Chinese Medicine* is well-known in China and in the Western world. The other one is reader-oriented and Daniel Bensky as well as his colleagues is the representatives. Both schools have had great influence on Chinese medicine translation (Hong, 2008).

Another salient achievement in the world of Chinese medicine translation is the translation of classic works of TCM. For instance, *Huangdi Neijing – Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine*, the oldest extant classic of TCM, has been translated into about eleven English versions (Zhang, 2009). The book is in a question-and-answer format between Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) and six of his ministers. Huangdi is one of the legendary Chinese sovereigns and now regarded as the initiator of Chinese civilization, and the ancestor of all Chinese. The translation work of *Huangdi Neijing* attracts a lot of interest and attention in the medical world, but flood of controversies about its translation accompanies. Some articles even argue for the translation of its title. Chen Minjie, etc. (2009) argue that Huang (yellow) Di (emperor) is a person’s name, not an emperor; it cannot be translated as Yellow Emperor literally. The English title, *Huangdi Neijing – Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine* mentioned in the above instance, is used by Li Zhaoguo in his translation of the book (Zhang, 2009), who is a famous expert in Chinese medicine translation in China. As the title shows, Li used Pinyin with an annotation in great effort to conform to the original meaning and make it authentic. Despite disagreements, it cannot be denied Yellow Emperor really carries the feature of China English and to some extent serves the purpose as Li expects.

4. Discussion on China English features in book title translation

Generally very short as they are, TCM book titles imply distinctive meanings of Chinese culture and possess individual linguistic features.

4.1. Cultural implication

In the eleven English versions of *Huangdi Neijing*, besides Li’s translation, Yellow Emperor is also used in another five translations with some different word order. *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*, *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine*, *The Yellow Emperor’s Canon Internal Medicine*, *The Illustrated Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine*, *The Medical Classic of the Yellow Emperor*. Obviously Yellow Emperor is mostly used. Huang (yellow) in this setting is relevant to earth (tu) according to the Five Phases doctrine of TCM, but it is also broadly and ideationally understood as a reference to Chinese people and China with yellow skin, symbolized by Yellow River and proud of the ancestor Yellow Emperor. We can see Yellow is a vital label for China and Chinese in Chinese traditional culture and Huangdi is more than a name. It bears distinct Chinese characteristics. Therefore, translating Huangdi into Yellow Emperor has a very solid cultural basis. It is perhaps unnecessary and meaningless to judge this translation very critically.

Huangdi Neijin, together with *Nanjing (Classic of Difficult Issues)*, *Shanghan Zabing Lun (Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Diseases)* and *Shennong Bencaojing (Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica)* are called four great classics of TCM. The translations in the brackets are extracted from WHO (World Health Organization) International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region, abbreviated as WPRO Standard (2007). Likewise, there are some different opinions and translations about them. Liuling, etc. (2006) claim that translating *Zabing* into *Miscellaneous Disease* would make target readers feel quite puzzled and using *treatise* to translate *Lun* cannot completely express the profound and complicated meaning of *Lun* in this book. They suggest transliterating into *Shanghan Zabing Lun*, which would become a borrowing word in English like “yin yang” and “qi” after a long term and further cultural contact. It could be an alternative because “if we simply translate Chinese words familiar to most readers with English words that are familiar to most readers, we cannot guarantee that the concept will not be distorted” (Wiseman 2001 p59).

Apart from *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica*, there are still other translations for *Shennong Bencaojing*, for example, *Divine Husbandman's Classic of Materia Medica* or *Divine Farmer's Materia Medica*. Similar to Huangdi, Shennong was a legendary ruler living in pre-dynastic China. He is regarded as God of farming, for he taught the ancient Chinese the practices of agriculture. He is also called Yandi (Yan Emperor, literally “Flame Emperor”) and is said to have tasted hundreds of herbs to test their medical value. From above explanation, Divine Husbandman or Farmer may convey more Chinese cultural information than Pinyin.

In addition to the four great classics, there are considerable Chinese medical classics descending from the ancient time, including some medical handbooks to offer convenient and urgent use for people. Take Zhouhou Beijifang for example. It is translated as *Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergency* in WPRO Standard (WHO, 2007). The book really functions as a handbook, but the exact meaning of Zhouhou (literally lower than the elbow, referring to the lower part of one's sleeve) in Chinese culture hasn't been expressed. Some experts translate it into *Emergency Prescriptions to keep up one's sleeve*. In Oxford Dictionaries on line, the phrase “up one's sleeve” means (of a strategy, idea, or resource) kept secret and in reserve for use when needed. It is highly equivalent to the Chinese context. In ancient China, people kept things in their sleeve in which there is a hidden pocket (baidu). Zhouhou here implies to carry the medical book in the sleeve to be ready for emergent use, which is very close to the definition of “up one's sleeve”, so *Emergency Prescriptions to keep up one's sleeve* is more consistent with the original background. One more example is *Zhouhouge*. It is about acupuncture and moxibustion and like a poem with seven characters to a line, is easy and helpful for people to read, to remember and to use. The translation can also be *Songs to keep up one's sleeve*.

4.2. Linguistic features

Lexis

“Borrowing has been long recognized as an important part of the nativization that English has undergone” (Yang 2005 p. 425) and “lexical borrowing is most commonly

defined as the influence on the linguistic patterns of a native language from another language with which it is in contact” (Tan 2009 p. 454). According to He and Li (2009 p. 73), “in general, China-specific words and expressions are rendered into English through one of two means: transliteration and loan translation.” Transliteration is frequently employed for book titles of TCM involved person’s names. In WPRO Standard (WHO, 2007), Yellow Emperor is considered as a person’s name and the titles with it are all translated in Pinyin.

Table 1

Huangdi Neijing	(Huangdi’s) Internal Classic	黄帝内经
Huangdineijingtaisu	Great Simplicity of Huangdi’s Internal Classic	黄帝内经太素
Huangdisuwenxuanminglunfang	Prescriptions and Expositions of Huangdi’s Plain Questions	黄帝素问宣明论方

Additionally, there are *Shennong’s Classic of Materia Medica (Shennongbencaojing)*, *Lei’s Treatise on Processing of Drugs (Leigongpaozhilun)*, *Complete Works of Jingyue (ingyuequanshu)*, *Binhu’s Sphygmology (Binhumaixue)*, *Precious Writings of Bianque (Bianquexinshu)*, etc. The last two are kind of special. Binhu is an alternative name of Li Shizhen who is called Saint of Pharmacy and is famous for his great masterpiece *Compendium of Materia Medica (Bencaogangmu)*. In ancient China, some people, especially men of letters, had an alternative name in terms of their dwelling place and aspiration besides a given name. Binhu comes from that background. But Bianque (literally magpie) is a nickname. Bianque is a distinguished doctor in Chinese history. It is said he got the nickname because he went here and there to treat people with his consummate medical skill and brought them good health and happiness like a magpie that is thought in Chinese culture flying everywhere to bring people good news. Bianque is remembered from generation to generation, but his real name Qin Yueren is rarely known (baidu).

Some transliterations found in WPRO Standard (WHO, 2007) are not the writer’s names. They are ideology underpinning the book or terms borrowed by English, such as *Confucian’s Duties to Their Parents (Rumenshiqin)* and *Discussion of the Mysteries of Circuits-Qi Modeled after the Plain Questions (Suwenrushiyunqilunao)*.

With regard to the translation of *A-B Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion (Zhenjiujiayijing)*, however, some researchers suggest using Pinyin jiayi instead of A-B since A-B is easily misunderstood as the first and second volumes. Xiaoping, etc. (2007) elaborate that *Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* has ten volumes which seem to be sorted by an ancient counting method in the order of jia, yi, bing, ding, and so on. It can be seen jia yi ranks the first and the second, so if jiayi is a sorting order of volumes, where are the volumes after it sorted by bingding, etc.? There are absolutely no, because the ten volumes are under the one title. There consequently come two opinions based on that

elaboration. The one is that the book expounds from two aspects --- theory and practice, so jiayi means two parts of the ten volumes while the other holds that jiayi refers to the basic knowledge for the beginners. It's hard to get a uniform explanation, but jiayi covers the messages that A-B cannot properly present. Transliteration as Jiayi Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion would be a better way.

Loan translation is defined by Romaine (1995 p. 57) as “rearranging words in the base language along patterns provided by the other and thus create a new meaning.” Some lexical terms in the TCM book titles are formed by translating them word for word or literally into English. The examples below from WPRO Standard (WHO, 2007) pertain to this category.

Table 2

Titles	Loan Translation
金匱玉函經 <i>Jinguiyuhanjing</i> Classic of the Golden Chamber and Jade Sheath	Golden Chamber and Jade Sheath
金匱要略 <i>Jinguiyaolue</i> Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber	Golden Chamber
溫熱經緯 <i>Wenrejingwei</i> Warp and Weft of Warm Heat Disease	Warp and Weft / Warm Heat
銅人輸穴針灸圖經 <i>Tongrenshuxue-zhenjiutujing</i> Illustrated Manual of Acupuncture Points of the Bronze Figure	Bronze Figure
十四經發揮 <i>Shisijingfahui</i> <i>Elucidation of the Fourteen Meridians / Channels</i>	Fourteen Meridians / Channels
劉涓子鬼遺方 <i>Liujuanziguoyifang</i> <i>Juanzi's Ghost-Bequeathed Prescriptions</i>	Ghost-Bequeathed Prescriptions
蘭室秘藏 <i>Lanshimicang</i> <i>Secret Records of the Orchid Chamber</i>	Orchid Chamber
銀海精微 <i>Yinhaijingwei</i> <i>Essence on the Silvery Sea</i>	Silvery Sea
玉機微義 <i>Yujiweiyi</i> <i>Subtle Meaning of the Jade Swivel</i>	Jade Swivel
醫宗金鑑 <i>Yizongjinjian</i> <i>Golden Mirror of Medicine</i>	Golden Mirror
春鑑錄 <i>Choongamrok</i> <i>Spring Mirror Records</i>	Spring Mirror

Syntax

China English has its own syntactic characteristics as He and Li (2009 p. 73) summarize them in four points: Four morpho-syllables, Parallel structure, Topicalization of adjuncts and Null Subject parameter. Table 2 shows the structure of most titles is in line with the first point. The common trait of TCM book titles is structurally concise and semantically condensed, which owns the style of ancient Chinese. In addition to four morpho-syllables, two, three and five morpho-syllables are also general types of TCM book titles. Because of the grammatical difference of Chinese and English, English counterpart of the titles is always longer than Chinese. Take *Huangdi Neijing – Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine* again, it is much irrelevant to Chinese at the syntactic level. By comparison, WHO’s translation, *(Huangdi’s) Internal Classic*, seems on a one by one correspondence with Chinese. And *Shennong’s Classic of Materia Medica (Shennong Bencaojing)* has five letters just corresponding to the five characters in Chinese. But if judging from the syllable, English is still longer than Chinese. As far as syntactic structure is concerned, transliteration is preferable. In order to mostly keep the consistence with the original pattern and flavour of Chinese, the book titles of the four great classics of TCM are strongly suggested utilizing Pinyin-based transliteration.

Conclusion

Book titles of TCM classics are not only emblems of the books, but also of the magnificence of TCM. Translation of them in China English can maintain uttermost Chinese cultural notions and linguistic features so as to avoid misleading and confusing transmission and communication of TCM. Analyses above reveal that under most circumstances, it is unable to find right equivalence in target language for TCM terms due to its distinctly native and local specialties. Its concise pattern and condensed content give rise to difficulties in achieving equivalent translation in both structure and context at the same time. Free translation in accordance with their content always fails to match their constructing and result in needless complexity. Literal translation is a little more favoured, but absolutely not the only choice. On the grounds of some researches, “the majority of the multiply recorded Chinese borrowings in Cannon (1988), loanwords and loan translations alike, were borrowed into English before the early twentieth century” (Yang 2009 p. 101), and “the changing roles of the source languages are also largely responsible for the fact that Pinyin-based Chinese loanwords have been gathering momentum, particularly during the past two or three decades” (Yang 2009 p. 101). Translation of Chinese medicine is a not-to-be-neglected participant in this momentum.

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