

# **Analysis and Methodological Research on the Problems Existing in the English Translation of Prescriptions under the Cultural Differences between China and the West**

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## **Abstract**

**As the popularity of Chinese medicine increases internationally, traditional Chinese medicine treatments such as prescriptions and acupuncture are also accepted by more and more people. However, the English translation of Chinese medical terms has always been controversial in the academic world. There are also multiple translations of one word, confusion and randomness in the English translation, and the factors of cultural differences between China and the West have increased the difficulty for foreign friends to understand Chinese medicine and hindered the process of Chinese medicine going abroad. This article is to conduct research from the perspective of cultural differences between China and the West, analyze the reasons for the English translation of prescriptions, namely material cultural differences and spiritual cultural differences, and explore the methods of English translation, namely literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, in order to help the development of Chinese medicine. Cross-cultural communication and inheritance of Chinese medicine.**

## **Keywords**

**Cross-cultural Communication; English Translation of Prescriptions; Cultural Differences between China and the West.**

## **1. Introduction**

As the popularity of Chinese medicine increases internationally, traditional Chinese medicine treatment methods such as prescriptions and acupuncture are also accepted by more and more people. After China joined the WTO, many countries in the world have begun to include Chinese medicine in the medical insurance system. Therefore, the English translation of Chinese medicine (prescriptions) has become increasingly important. But what follows is the problem of inconsistency in the English translation of Chinese medicine. There will be multiple English translations of the same Chinese medical term, different prescription terms may also have the same translation and the factors of cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures increase the difficulty for foreign friends to understand Chinese medicine and hinder the process of Chinese medicine's dissemination abroad. This article is to conduct research from the perspective of cultural differences between China and the West, analyze the problems and causes of the English translation of Chinese prescriptions, discuss the methods of translation of Chinese prescriptions, and hope to help the Cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine and the inheritance of Chinese medicine.

## **2. Problems in the English Translation of Prescriptions under the Cultural Differences between China and the West**

As the main body of traditional Chinese medicine, the prescriptions of traditional Chinese medicine have fully absorbed the theoretical and practical experience of various doctors after

thousands of years, and created countless good prescriptions. They are the crystallization of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. However, due to the lack of a unified translation standard, there are many translations of the names of traditional Chinese medicines. Confusion, irregular translation, and mistranslation can be seen everywhere, specifically manifested in the phenomenon of different translations of the same prescription, the same translation of different prescriptions, and cultural mistranslation.

### 2.1. Different Translations of the Same Prescription

Due to the lack of uniform translation standards and norms, different translators often adopt their own translation standards and principles when translating the names of Chinese medicine prescriptions, which leads to multiple English translations of the same Chinese medicine prescription name. For example, the prescription Shixiao san is a blood regulating agent, which has the effects of promoting blood circulation, removing blood stasis, resolving masses and relieving pain. This prescription mainly treats the symptoms of blood stasis, postpartum lochia, irregular menstruation, abdominal pain and other symptoms. After taking this prescription, the patient got rid of all the symptoms unknowingly, and couldn't help laughing with joy, hence the name Shixiao san. English translations include Sudden Smile Powder, Wonderful Powder for Relieving Blood Stagnation and Breaking into a Smile Powder. However, the translation of "Wonderful Powder for Relieving Blood Stagnation" only shows that the medicine has the effect of promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis, and fails to express the cultural charm of the original sentence. Take the English translation of "Jianzi Shengjiang Soup" in "Treatise on Febrile Diseases" as an example, at present, there are different translation names such as "Zhizi Shengjiang Chi Decoction", "Gardenia, Fresh Ginger, and Fermented Soybean Decoction", "decoction of Capejasmine, Fresh ginger and Fermented soybean", "Gardenia, Fresh ginger and Prepared Soybean Decoction (zhī zǐ shēng jiāng chǐ tāng)", "Decoction of Fructus Gardeniae, Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens and Semen Sojae Praeparatum". [1] There are multiple translation names for the same prescription, which not only affects the standardization of the English translation of prescriptions, but also is not conducive to the external dissemination of Chinese medicine culture.

### 2.2. Same Translations of the Different Prescriptions

Due to some prescriptions use the same medicine, different prescriptions may have the same English translation term in the process of English translation. For example, the prescription Yunv jian is a heat-clearing agent, which has the effects of clearing heat in the internal organs, clearing heat in the stomach, and nourishing kidney yin. Indications are symptoms of stomach-heat yin deficiency syndrome, headache, toothache, loose teeth, blemishes, fever and thirst. The name comes from ancient Chinese legend. According to the legend, Guanyin Bodhisattva has two attendants named Golden Boy and Jade Girl, and Golden Boy holds the golden bottle, the lady's hand holds the willow branch, which is used to dip the water from the bottle, and it will be cool when it is sprinkled on the ground. This is a metaphor for the power of nourishing yin and reducing fire, hence the name Yunv jian. English translations include Jade Lady Brew, gypsum decoction, and Jade Woman Decoction. [2] The second translation from English to Chinese is gypsum decoction, which is the same translation with another prescription gypsum soup. However, the former is composed of gypsum, *Rehmannia glutinosa*, *Ophiopogon japonicus*, *Anemarrhena*, *Achyranthes bidentata*, and can be used to treat stomach fire, kidney yin deficiency to periodontitis, oral ulcers, diabetes and other plagues. The latter is composed of gypsum, coptis, cork, scutellaria, incense soy, gardenia, ephedra, etc., and is used for clearing heat and purging fire, sweating and relieving the surface. This is a prescription with two different ingredients, and its translated name should also be different.

### 2.3. Mistranslation

The name of the prescription is a cultural reflection of doctors' comprehensive use of Chinese medicine to treat diseases for thousands of years. Due to history, geography, religion, customs and other reasons, there are various naming methods. The translator needs to understand the relevant historical and cultural background of the name of the prescription in order to produce a translation that is both faithful and credible and understandable by foreign friends. Otherwise, it is easy to cause mistranslations to translate prescriptions solely based on the literal meaning. For example, the "drink" in the prescription fragrant drink is easy to cause misunderstanding. According to the literal meaning, it is understood to be a liquid and drinkable medicine, but this is not the case in fact, but a solid powdery medicine. Fragrant oleracea drink is composed of the three herbs of oleracea, lentil, and Magnolia officinalis. It is ground into a coarse powder form and decocted in water for consumption. "Drink" is its type and should be translated as powder instead of drink. [3]Therefore, not only the fidelity of the translation must be paid attention to in the translation process, but also the cultural differences between China and the West.

## 3. Analysis of the English Translation of Prescriptions under the Cultural Differences between China and the West

Oriental culture originated in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins of China. The ancestors of the Chinese nation who lived in this area for thousands of years have created a broad, profound and brilliant oriental culture.

Western culture originated from the ancient Greek culture in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions. The ocean environment where it is located, with the interlacing of land and sea, cultivated the free nature of the Western nation and formed a primitive adventurous and extraverted national character. [4]Different historical and cultural backgrounds have caused differences in medical thinking between Chinese and the Western. As the saying goes, the unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants. Different cultural inheritance has created the difference between Chinese and Western material and spiritual culture.

### 3.1. Differences in Spiritual Culture

Due to the difference in material and cultural life between China and the West, there is a big difference in material culture between China and the West. For example, Chinese people like to play Tai Chi, Mahjong, and Kung Fu, but these words have no corresponding culture in the Western world, Traditional Chinese medicine has a history of more than 2,000 years of development. It not only has rich cultural connotations, but also has a high degree of acceptance and recognition through the integration of the essence of diverse medical cultures such as Tibetan medicine and Mongolian medicine. The traditional Chinese medicine used in the prescriptions is the theme of traditional Chinese medicine, with strong Chinese traditional material and cultural characteristics. Traditional Chinese medicine has always emphasized "authentic" medicinal materials. The production and distribution of natural medicinal materials cannot be separated from the natural growth environment. The physical geography of our country is complex, with differences in water, soil, sunshine, climate, and biological distribution. Therefore, the production of natural Chinese medicinal materials also has certain regional characteristics. Such as "Zhe Ba Wei" (Scrophulariaceae, Ophiopogon, Atractylodes, Fritillaria, Corydalis, Radix Paeoniae Rubra, Turmeric, Chrysanthemum) represented by authentic medicinal materials produced in Zhejiang Province are basically distributed in Ningbo, Shaoxing Plain and Northern Tai Hu Lake basin, In addition, there are Chinese wolfberry from Ningxia, rhubarb from Xining, Qinghai, Gansu, aconite from Sichuan, Angelica from Minxian, Coptis from Shizhu County, Codonopsis from Shanxi, Fritillaria from Aba Ganzhi, E Jiao from

Shandong, Ginseng from Jilin, Qin pi from Shaanxi, Adenophora from Shandong, notoginseng from Yunnan, etc. They are all well-known at home and abroad for their high quality. Many so-called "authentic" Chinese medicinal materials are mostly grown in East Asia. However, Chinese medicines are not yet popular in Western countries. Special approvals are required to use them. They are not as common as in China, so it is difficult to find the corresponding English words. As political science says, the economic foundation determines the superstructure. It is difficult for readers who do not speak Chinese as their mother tongue and do not live in a Chinese environment to understand the straightforward translations of prescriptions or relate them to the things in their minds correspond.

### 3.2. Differences in Material Culture

Due to the differences in the living environment between China and the West, there are also considerable differences in spiritual culture between Chinese and Westerners. For example, Chinese people are good at abstract thinking and Westerners think logically. Of course, both sides have different understandings of the same thing.

TCM discourse is a philosophical discourse. TCM was born in the soil of traditional Chinese culture and is deeply influenced by ancient Chinese philosophy. Ancient Chinese philosophy not only provides guidance on the world view and methodology for the development of TCM, but also directly provides TCM with conceptual systems such as Qi, Yin and Yang, and the Five Elements. In TCM discourse, philosophical categories are the basic concepts, and philosophical speculation is the basic way of thinking. [5] The philosophical terms and categories used in TCM have metaphysical attributes, and there are often no purely objective entities in TCM conceptual terms. Therefore, the semantics of Chinese medical terms appear erratic, with ambiguity. The theory of viscera, body fluid, qi and blood, meridian and collaterals in TCM are not verifiable. They can neither be verified nor falsified, nor can they be quantified, structured, and logicalized. Traditional Chinese medicine theories often give people the feeling of "mysterious", they are cast in the color of "mysterious", and they are judged as "the science of mystery".

Western medicine discourse belongs to scientific discourse. Western medicine emerged and developed in the soil of Western science and culture. It is deeply influenced by Western science and culture. Its philosophical foundation is atomism, structure theory, reductionism and analysis theory. It uses "substance view" as the premise and uses analysis. [6] Methods such as reduction, experimental verification, and logical reasoning are used to understand human life and diseases. The terminology of western medicine is clear, can be repeatedly verified and described with exact data, the semantics is single and precise, and the ambiguity are eliminated. Western medical discourse is the use of modern scientific and technological discourse to describe human life and disease phenomena. It has the characteristics of accuracy, orderliness, and clarity. Therefore, whether it is to use pure Chinese medicine thinking to explain the prescriptions of Chinese medicine, or to allow foreigners to use pure Western medicine thinking to understand the prescriptions, it is difficult for the promotion of prescriptions.

### 3.3. Summary

The language of Chinese medicine is a language based on metaphoric cognition of "image-taking and analogy", "from the cause of disease, pathogenesis, treatment to prescriptions, all are permeated with metaphorical thinking mode". As the national characteristics of TCM metaphors have strong spiritual and cultural differences compared with the West, it increases the difficulty of translating and understanding the names of such prescriptions. For example, directly translating "Qing long Decoction" into "Blue Dragon Decoction" will be caused by cultural taboos, "dragon" is a symbol of auspiciousness and dignity in traditional Chinese culture. In ancient times, it was even used to symbolize the emperor. Chinese people were also used to calling themselves the descendants of the dragon. With the help of metaphors, "Qing long"

draws analogy attached to "Qing long, Bai hu, Suzaku, Xuan wu, the four spirits of the sky, with the town square" and " Cloud from the dragon" vividly depicting the "Da qing long tang" has the effect of sweating. "Like a dragon walking with clouds and rain, dragon walking will give birth to clouds. [9]After the rain follows the clouds, the rain can nourish everything", which makes the metaphorical cultural image of the prescription and the efficacy of the medicine complement each other. But in Western countries, the "dragon" is a symbol of evil and cruelty. The Bible even regards the dragon as the incarnation of the devil, Satan. Therefore, the difference in the image of dragons in Chinese and Western cultures is likely to cause disagreement among foreign readers and causes cultural distortion and cultural conflict, which is not conducive to the spread of metaphorical cultural images of metaphorical formula names. This "dragon" is not the other "dragon" and must not be translated into "dragon" in English. Therefore, this sentence should be translated into "Qing Long Decoction" when translating.

Due to cultural differences, many obstacles will inevitably be caused in the process of prescription translation. Material cultural differences and spiritual cultural differences will bring troubles to translators and other members involved in Cross-cultural communication. In order to avoid such impacts, we should understand Chinese and Western cultures as much as possible in the process of translating prescriptions. And on the basis of understanding, use appropriate translation strategies to give a satisfactory translation, thereby promoting Cross-cultural communication.

#### **4. Methods of Translating Prescription Names**

The translation of prescription names has always been one of the most concerned problems in the translation industry. Translation work has a long way to go, and it has an inestimable effect on the inheritance and internationalization of Chinese medicine culture. The name of TCM prescriptions directly or indirectly explains the efficacy and ingredients of prescriptions. It has certain prescription information, which helps people to understand its function and significance more deeply, and to a certain extent, it has very great practicality. Therefore, when translating the names of traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions, it is necessary to ensure the information of the translation so that the translation is clear at a glance and let foreign readers understand the name and effect of the prescription to the greatest extent. The three methods of translation are listed below, namely literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, each of these three methods has strengths and weaknesses, and should be used flexibly according to actual conditions.

##### **4.1. Literal Translation**

Literal translation refers to the way in which it is translated word by word in accordance with the form of the original language and its own meaning in translation. Use literal translation to translate the names of TCM prescriptions, so that the translation is more appropriate to the original text, and the meaning of the expression is more concise and clear, so that the information density of the original text can be consistent to a certain extent, and it has the characteristics of being faithful to the original text. [7] In addition, the back-translatibility of literal translation is better, which can better reflect the connotation of Chinese medicine culture. In the process of translating the names of traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions, using literal translation to translate them can better preserve the cultural connotations contained in the names of prescriptions and increase readers' interest in reading. In this method of literal translation, some readers may not be able to participate very well because of lack of corresponding cultural knowledge, but it can inject more cultural characteristics into it, which can make readers feel the unique foreign atmosphere and expand their cultural vision, it has played a very active role in promoting cultural exchanges. Due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the unique meaning of Chinese medicine itself, although the

literal translation method is simple, the English vocabulary of Western medicine cannot fully express the connotation of the concept of Chinese medicine and its deep meaning network, and it only looks for equivalence in medical vocabulary. The forced translation of Chinese medicine by words will inevitably lead to biased understanding, because the English translation of Chinese medicine is not all the English translation of medicine. For example, the prescription "Feier Pill" has the effects of invigorating the stomach, eliminating accumulation and deworming, and is used for symptoms such as dyspepsia, abdominal pain of worms, yellowish muscles, diarrhea and diarrhea due to lack of food. The name "Feier Pill" is to highlight the good effect of this prescription, which means that the baby will grow strong and healthy. However, if it is literally translated as fattening baby pill, it is questionable. The reason is that the word "fat" in English means too obesity, which is unhealthy. [8] Therefore, in the process of literal translation, we should pay attention to the differences in Cross-cultural communication and use dialectical thinking to translation.

#### 4.2. Free Translation

Paraphrase refers to the meaning of the original prescription without translating it verbatim. Using this method to translate the names of Chinese medicine prescriptions can make the translation easier to understand, reduce ambiguity, and reflect the language characteristics of the nation to a greater extent. The author believes that this method can greatly reduce the difficulty of Cross-cultural communication caused by the differences between Chinese and Western spiritual cultures, and eliminate the ambiguity caused by the different discourses (thinking modes) of Chinese and Western medicine when reading prescription books, so that foreigners can better understand the meaning of the prescription named by the method of "image-taking and analogy" of Chinese medicine. However, under certain circumstances, due to the TCM terminology carrying information is divided into multiple translated words and is too long, the information density network is greatly reduced, and it is difficult to understand, memorize, and popularize and apply. For example, the prescription "Yiguan jian" has the effect of nourishing the kidney and liver, and can treat the syndrome of liver and kidney yin deficiency and liver qi insufficiency. Translated as "an ever effective decoction for nourishing the liver and kidney", although it can reflect the function of the drug, it is too complicated, is not conducive to memory and writing. Therefore, when using free translation to translate the effects of Chinese medicine prescriptions, it should be more concise and easy to understand, which will also test the translator's translation level and cultural skills.

#### 4.3. Transliteration Method

Transliteration refers to a translation method that uses symbols of one character, such as Pinyin, to explain another character. Some Chinese words and sentences contain strong Chinese characteristics and have very profound meanings, and it is difficult to find the corresponding English words in English words for these words and sentences. The terms used in Chinese medicine prescriptions are inherently complicated, so you don't have to bother to find the equivalent English. Instead, new words or phrases are created according to the laws of the English language. In the translation of the names of Chinese medicine prescriptions, if you want to make the unique concept of Chinese medicine retain its unique connotation in the English translation process, the use of transliteration is the most effective method, which can preserve the connotation of Chinese medicine to the greatest extent. To a certain extent, the national character of our country's language is maintained, allowing it to gradually occupy an important position in the international field through cultural exchanges. This method can solve the problems caused by the difference between Chinese and Western material civilizations, and directly translate some obscure Chinese medicine or Chinese medicine terms with pinyin, effectively reducing the reading threshold of foreign readers for Chinese medicine books. At present, most of the English translations of prescription names adopt the method of Chinese

Pinyin or Chinese Pinyin plus Chinese translation. For example, Baihe gujin Tang is translated as " Baihe gujin decoction". However, this kind of translation method that directly uses Chinese pinyin does not translate the connotation, pure transliteration "that is, the relationship between the symbol, the symbol, and the symbol interpretation is cut off during transcoding, resulting in the loss of cultural information", [9]even due to the possibility of homophones in Chinese It will cause the paradox of the translation, which is not conducive to the foreign exchange of Chinese medicine culture, and it is difficult for foreign consumers to understand and still needs improvement. In addition, in the translation of the names of TCM prescriptions, if the literal translation or transliteration is used alone, the cultural connotations in the names of TCM prescriptions cannot be well reflected, and sometimes the meaning of the sentence will become ambiguous, cause ambiguity or make people have a certain misunderstanding. In this case, we can use literal translation or transliteration plus annotation method to translate.

## 5. Conclusion

In Cross-cultural communication, people seem to be dominant, but in fact, people's behavior and thinking are influenced by culture. Due to the differences in Chinese and Western regional cultures, Chinese and Westerners often have different understandings of the same thing. The naming of TCM prescriptions reflects the thinking and cognitive models of the ancestors of the Chinese nation. However, foreign readers generally lack the knowledge of Chinese cultural background. It is generally difficult to read or even understand the medical information contained in it. Reasonable use of literal translation, free translation and transliteration, and add notes when necessary, we should clearly understand the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, so that the effect and quality of Chinese and Western Cross-cultural communication can reach a satisfactory level, and the goal of good communication between different contexts can be effectively realized. As an important cultural carrier, prescriptions can not only fully demonstrate the peculiarities of Eastern and Western medical culture, but also promote the exchange and communication of Chinese and Western cultures to a certain extent. So that Western readers can appreciate the connotation and artistic value of TCM prescriptions like those whose mother tongue is Chinese. In this way, the acceptance and recognition of TCM prescriptions among foreign readers will be improved, and the spread and exchange of TCM prescriptions will be promoted in a true sense.

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