The Ambiguity of Translating Chinese Medicine

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**Background and Aims:**

The issue of the ways of translating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been disputed by many doctors, pharmacologists, linguists, and TCM related researchers. This is a complicated issue including the knowledge of western medicine and TCM, the different cultural background and the value systems, the political considerations, and so forth. The differences of cultures will not make serious disputes though the cultures themselves are arbitrary and may not be accepted by other cultures. However, the author argues that the linguistic problems like the phonetic systems themselves or the political bias which affects the selection of phonetic systems are not the points. Namely, it doesn’t matter whether we translate the spleen as pi or p’i, uterus as zi gong or tsí kong. The point is the discrepant concepts between western medicine and TCM.

As the conventional stereotypical treatment-oriental service has been gradually shifted to the medicine-oriental customized care integrating genetic medicine and constitutional medicine, the expectation of the role of traditional medicine has being raising. That is, the future of the traditional medicine is estimated more and more highly. To internationalize the oriental medicine, the languages and the translation are two of the keys.

Chinese translations are certainly difficult, even for a translation services professional who is an absolute expert in the various Chinese dialects and language groups. Such a translator would be superhuman to begin with, because Chinese has been described, with some accuracy, as the most illogical and unwieldy language in the world. And that’s a world that contains English, so that’s saying something. Now if you imagine that not only are you trying to translate something originally written in Chinese into, say, English, but this work is also a work of medical science, you are truly on a rocky and treacherous road.

**Materials and Methods:**

The definitions of five viscera and six bowels in TCM differ from the ones in the western medicine. For example, the term spleen in Chinese medicine is a wider concept than it is in the western medicine. From the perspective of the prescriptions