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On English Translation of Du-related Words from Zhuang Medicine

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Abstract: Current discussions on the Chinese word *du*, as an important concept in Zhuang medicine, are not systematically organized, and some of the discussions are confusing and even misleading. Based on the translation thinking for *du*-related contents in works of traditional Chinese medicine, this paper will explore the English translation of different *du* words in Zhuang medicine. It is suggested that similar English translation strategies and word selection standards for TCM terms should be adopted in standardization and internationalization of *du* words in Zhuang medicine.

Keywords: Zhuang medicine; Du-related Words; English translation

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1 Introduction

The Chinese word *du* (毒), literally "toxin" in English, is an important concept in both traditional Chinese medicine and Zhuang medicine. A famous *du*-related Chinese legend can be found in numerous ancient documents and persists even in current times. The legend tells how "Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs to test their medical value, and he differentiated more than 70 types of poisonous ones in one day". The single Chinese character *du* is used in the original text to represent poisonous herbs. Many *du*-related records from different dynasties can be found in a great number of documents on traditional Chinese medicine. Without a generally recognized writing system through the history of the Zhuang nationality, it is difficult to systematically study *du*-related records through Zhuang literature. However, many *du*-related contents can still be found in Zhuang medical ballads and other Zhuang people's orally inherited materials, ancient Chinese documents and well-organized modern Zhuang medical materials.

In recent years, there is ever-increasing research on *du* in Zhuang medicine. However, there are few studies about the English translation of *du*-related descriptions in Zhuang medicine. Most discussions about the English translation of *du*-related Zhuang medical words are scattered among separated passages of various papers. These discussions are not systematically organized, with some of them being confusing and even misleading. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct systematic analysis of existing English translation of *du* words in Zhuang

medicine and explore the rules for translating these words. Meng Jieqiong and other researchers have explored the translation strategy for diagnostic terms of Zhuang medicine based on *International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine*[1]. Historically, Zhuang medicine has been deeply affected by traditional Chinese medicine. Therefore traditional Chinese medicine and Zhuang medicine share many identical terms, and there are also many similar terms between them. It is feasible and beneficial to explore the English translations of Zhuang medical terms, particularly of *du* words, based on existing achievements in standardization and internationalization of terminologies for traditional Chinese medicine, as repetitive work can be avoided and similar international translation standards for Zhuang medical terms can be achieved. For these reasons, this paper will explore the English translation of different *du* words in Zhuang medicine based on the translation thinking for *du*-related contents in works of traditional Chinese medicine.

2 The meaning of one-syllable word du and its translation

The one-syllable word *du* is called "doeg" in the Zhuang language. Traditionally, Zhuang people have lived in subtropical areas, where poisonous substances, including animals, plants and minerals, emerge in the complex geographical conditions and humid, hot climate. In close contact with various poisonous substances, Zhuang people have a profound and unique understanding of *du*. According to Zhuang medicine, *du* has four basic connotations: (1) pathogenic factors, (2) poisonous substances, (3) poisons and detoxifying drugs, and (4) disease names[2]. Generally, *du* as a monosyllable can be directly translated as toxin. In Zhuang medicine, toxin is one of the important causes of disease and "pathogenicity of toxin and of deficiency" is a major theory of Zhuang medicine[3].

Some researchers made mistakes in translating the one-syllable word *du,* including completely wrong translation and the existence of several alternative translations for the monosyllable *du*. In a paper about the toxic diseases in Zhuang medicine, *du* is mistakenly translated into "virus", and " 毒病 " is likewise wrongly translated into "virus disease", "viral disease" and "sepsis"[4]. "Virus" is not an original concept of Zhuang medicine, and it is a totally unacceptable English translation. In *A Project Report on the Translation of Characteristic Zhuang Medicine Therapies,* the researcher has listed multiple English translations for *du*: toxin, poison, noxious substance, and noxious agents. Inconsistency occurs as the researcher has seemingly randomly applied different translations in different passages of the book, and these include poison, noxious agents and toxicity. The researcher has even translated " 邪毒 " into "poison or pathogen", which is totally wrong. All these reflect that the researcher has failed to have a deep understanding of *du*[5].

In a TCM case study, the researcher applied literal translation to a TCM term with ambiguous referent and contradictory use in classic works, to permit the readers to judge its referent in relevant context, and in this way the several meanings and ambiguity in TCM terminologies can be preserved[6]. Different works of TCM have also applied literal translation to *du*-related words, possibly due to similar considerations. It can be seen in *WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region* (IST), *International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine* (ISC), and *Chinese Terms in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy*, that a majority of *du* words are literally translated as "toxin". Similarly in Zhuang medicine, literal translation can be adopted for *du* words, particularly for the monosyllable *du*, to allow readers to judge the referents and to preserve the polysemy and ambiguity of some Zhuang medical terminologies.

In addition to the character " 毒 ", disyllables including " 毒 邪 "and " 邪 毒 ", as synonyms of the monosyllable " 毒 ", are also used to describe the basic connotations of " 毒 ". Mixed use of these words can be found in Zhuang medical textbooks and other literature. Similar cases occur in TCM literature. Disyllablization of Chinese vocabulary possibly plays a role. Chinese word-building has evolved from monosyllable to disyllable[7]. In a number of documents on TCM or Zhuang medicine, the monosyllable " 毒 " is used in the text from the very beginning and then gradually replaced with disyllables such as " 毒 邪 " and " 邪 毒 " in the same text, indicating their preference for usage of disyllables. A researcher suggests that different translations should be applied to disyllables as synonyms of monosyllable " 毒 " in Zhuang medicine. The suggestion is not convincing. The researcher believes that " 毒 邪 " should be translated into "pathogenic factor" or "toxic pathogen" according to its broad or narrow senses, and that appropriate

translation should be selected according to relevant context. The monosyllable “ 毒 ” in TCM is directly translated into “toxin”, regardless of its broad and narrow senses and multiple basic connotations. The broad and narrow senses of monosyllable “ 毒 ” are consistent with these of “ 毒 邪 ”, therefore “ 毒 邪 ” can also be directly translated into toxin, the discussed translation for monosyllable “ 毒 ”. It’s worth noting that the researcher gives two different translations for “ 毒 邪 ”, but neither of them are adopted in the translation in what follows in that researcher’s article. The researcher points out that “ 毒虚 ” in “ 毒虚损正 ” refers to “ 毒 邪 ” and “ 正 气 ”, but adopts “toxin” as the translation of “ 毒邪 ”. From the perspective of “ 毒 邪 ” in TCM，it’s also translated into “toxin”, the same translation as that of “ 毒 ”. In summary, it is feasible to translate both “ 毒 ” and “ 毒邪 ” into “toxin”. While this can avoid introducing confusion and complexity into English translation, it can also help foreign readers understand *du*, and improve their acceptance of the *du* concept.

3 Different du words and their translations

3.1 Intangible toxin

In the Zhuang region, the hot and rainy natural environments give rise to characteristic common toxin including “ 痧 ”, “ 瘴 ”, “ 风 ”, “ 湿 ” and “ 热 ”[8]. This kind of toxin, which has no corresponding concept in modern Western medicine, can be translated literally, the most common strategy. Literal translation is applied to similar TCM terms include “ 火 毒 (fire toxin) ”, “ 寒 毒 (cold toxin) ”, “ 热 毒 (heat toxin) ”, and “ 湿 毒 (dampness toxin) ”[9]. The key thing to notice is the use of short and brief words in Zhuang medicine, leading to the expression of the same meaning with different words about intangible toxin. For instance, the terms “ 痧 ”, “ 瘴 ”, “ 风 ”, “ 湿 ” and “ 热 ” are also respectively called “ 痧 毒 ”, “ 瘴 毒 ”, “ 风 毒 ”, “ 湿毒 ” and “ 热毒 ”, with the character “ 毒 ” added. It possibly has something to do with the lack of a generally recognized writing system through the history of the Zhuang nationality and the reliance on oral inheritance of Zhuang medical information. Using different words to convey the same meaning can also be seen in TCM, and literal translation of different words is one of the adopted strategies. For example, the English translation “miasmic toxin” is used for “ 瘴毒 , 瘴气 and 山岚瘴气 ”, which are also translated as miasma, since the original words refer to a miasma that is said to be the cause of a certain type of “malaria”[10]. In essence, “ 瘴 毒 ” is literally translated as “miasmic toxin”, and the basic word “ 瘴 (瘴 气 , 山 岚 瘴 气)” is literally translated as “miasma”. Therefore literal translation can be applied to different words for the same meaning when referring to intangible toxin. Suggested translations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Translation of intangible toxin

Intangible toxin	English translation	Synonym	English translation
痧	sha	痧毒	sha toxin
瘴	miasma	瘴毒	miasmic toxin
风	wind	风毒	wind toxin
湿	dampness	湿毒	dampness toxin
热	heat	热毒	heat toxin

In existing research, Huang Huiqi has translated intangible toxin “ 湿毒 ” into “noxious dampness”[5]. Meng Jieqiong and other researchers have suggested that “ 风 毒 ” should be translated into “toxic wind” and “wind illness” according to its specific meaning[11]. These translations are unconvincing as they lack bidirectional translatability and the achievements in international standard terminologies on TCM are not considered. Currently good bidirectional translatability can be seen in the translation of TCM terms in IST and ISC. The translation of legal and technical texts provides good bidirectional translatability with similar forms in original and target texts, and TCM translation also requires bidirectional translatability as it is cross-cultural, involving two-way communication activity in which both parties need to understand that they are discussing the same object[12]. Therefore, “ 湿 毒 ” and “ 风 毒 ” in Zhuang medicine should not be translated into “noxious dampness” and “toxic wind” as these translations provide bad bidirectional translatability. “Dampness toxin” and “wind toxin” should be adopted. It is also unnecessary to translate “ 风 毒 ” into “wind illness” according to its different meanings, as *du* is omitted and Zhuang medical thinking is removed in the translation. Different meanings of the same word can share the same translation. Take “ 温 毒 ” in TCM for example. “ 温 毒 ” also has two distinct meanings including the name of a disease, but it is translated into “warm toxin” for both meanings[10]. The bidirectional translatability of different words for intangible toxin

should be guaranteed through literal translation.

3.2 Tangible toxin

Zhuang people live in a natural environment with a great number of toxic materials, and they are subject to poisonous food, drugs, plants and animals, as well as the invasion of insects, snakes and beasts[8]. A majority of words for tangible toxin have corresponding concepts in English, and they can be directly translated according to relevant Chinese expressions. For instance, “毒蛇” can be translated into “venomous snake” and “毒树” can be translated into “poisonous tree”.

In tangible toxin, “蛊毒” is a word which carries the distinctive characteristic of Zhuang culture, and it has no corresponding English concept. The Zhuang region is known as “蛊毒之乡”[13]. It means the Zhuang region is full of such toxin. One researcher has translated “蛊毒” as “disease due to noxious agents produced by various parasites”[5]. The translation is as long as the explanation provided by a dictionary, enlarging a disyllabic *du*-related word into a long clause. It is not easy to use and it violates conciseness. Another researcher, from the perspective of national characteristics, has translated “蛊” into “gu” and “蛊邪” as “gu pathogen”, since the expressions are appropriate and the creation of new words retains Zhuang culture whilst allowing target English readers to learn proprietary terms of Zhuang medicine[14]. However, the researcher has not taken the superstitious connotation of the word “蛊” into account. Shortcomings in culture should be avoided. Zhuang medical culture might be questioned if foreign readers look into the word and find that it is an outdated concept. Acceptance by readers should be taken into account for the translation of the word “蛊”. “蛊毒” also exists in TCM and it is translated as “parasitic toxin” and “worm toxin”. Even though “蛊毒” is different in TCM and Zhuang medicine, it is feasible to directly adopt the translation in TCM, such as “parasitic toxin”. All in all, consistent translation applied to the same word form can help foreign readers to understand and accept Zhuang medical concepts based on relevant concepts in TCM.

3.3 *Du* in disease names

Hundreds of disease names in Zhuang medicine have been collected from document records and field investigation, and *du*-related disease names are most common among them[15]. For these disease names, literal translation should be applied to those that do not exist in Western medicine, to retain their cultural connotations. For the concepts that exist in Western medicine, they should be translated into modern disease names, or literally translated names together with the conventional disease name. It is also how IST and ISC deal with similar cases, even though the word *du* seems to be omitted in modern disease names. For example, it is recorded in documents that Zhuang ancestors are experienced in treating “沙虱毒”. “沙虱毒” refers to “tsutsugamushi disease (恙虫病)”, therefore it can be translated as “chigger disease/toxin (tsutsugamushi disease)” or simply “tsutsugamushi disease”.

3.4 Removing toxin

“解毒 (removing toxin)” is an important principle of treatment in Zhuang medicine[16]. According to documents and field investigation, there are more than one hundred toxic substances and detoxicating drugs found in Zhuang medicine[3]. Chenjia Baiyao and Ganjia Baiyao are two highly praised Zhuang detoxifying drugs in Zhuang medicine. In a research paper on general rules of treatment in Zhuang medicine, the researchers hold that “毒” in “解毒” should be translated as “toxic materials” to better reflect the understanding of “毒” in Zhuang medicine, as “toxin” can not appropriately show how “毒” is understood in Zhuang medicine[17]. However, there is no word that is able to completely express how “毒” is interpreted, and there is also no phrase that is able to comprehensively reflect what “解毒” means in all Zhuang medical contexts. In Zhuang medicine, good use is made of herbs. In the Zhuang medical term “解 毒”, what toxin can be removed, and whether toxin is removed, greatly depend on the herbs used. Take TCM for example: a number of herbs used in Huanglian Jiedu Formula and Qingwen Baidu Formula have the action of purging heat, but they can not effectively remove toxin[18]. In Zhuang medicine, the connotations of “解毒” also vary with herbs and formulas. Works on international standards for TCM terms like IST and ISC are more reliable than dictionaries. Neither IST nor ISC adopt “toxic materials” which is from the dictionary explanation, and “materials” just indicates a part of the connotations of “毒”. For “解毒” in all Zhuang medical contexts, “毒” can be simply translated as “toxin” and “解毒” as “remove toxin” or as “detoxify”, so that the concise description and explanation of actions of herbs can be indicated in English translations, while notes can be used to explain its real and exact meanings in specific contexts as necessary. This is also how “解毒” in TCM is handled in IST and ISC.

3.5 *Du* in prescription names

Popular translation strategies used for TCM prescriptions include: the transliteration of all parts of a prescription name, the transliteration of the specific part plus other translation method for the general part, and the simple translation of all parts. These translation strategies can be applied to Zhuang prescriptions. For example, " 活络透毒饮 " can be translated into Huoluo Toudu Formula or Huoluo Toudu Yin. Transliteration is widely used in the translation of prescriptions. What is noteworthy is that in the discussion, transliteration is only adopted for the " 毒 " of prescription names. Actually, transliteration of " 毒 " basically occurs in the prescription names, particularly in the general part, in IST and ISC.

4 Conclusion

Standardization and internationalization of terminologies for Zhuang medicine and TCM are being carried out continuously. Nowadays a number of TCM concepts have been widely accepted by the international community, thanks to the internationalization of terminologies for Zhuang medicine and TCM. For example, yin-yang concept appeared on the cover of the top journal *Nature Immunology* in 2005 to emphasize the balance between regulatory T cells and reactive cells: "The 'yin-yang' icon is a symbol of balance and harmony between two opposing forces"[19] .On the cover of Science in 2013, a yin-yang symbol is superimposed on a scanning electron micrograph of a mouse tissue alveolar macrophage, to emphasize similar balance[20]. In addition to yin-yang concept, there are many similar concepts in Zhuang medicine, including that of toxin. The adoption of similar English translation strategies and word selection standards for TCM terms can help mitigate cultural shock and promote the acceptance of Zhuang medical concepts in the rest of the world. If the English translations of Zhuang medical terms are developed independently without using the achievements in the standardization and internationalization of TCM terms, unsatisfactory English translations may result, and the relationship between TCM and Zhuang medicine will be hidden. Based on the achievements in *du*-related words in TCM, standardization and internationalization of *du* words in Zhuang medicine will be more robust, and thus relevant Zhuang medical culture can be better promoted and benefit people all over the world.

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