

# What Online Traditional Medicine Dictionaries Bring To English Speakers Now? Concepts or Equivalents?

Lu Fang\*

*Sichuan Vocational and Technical College, Foreign Languages Department, Suining, China*

## Abstract

**Citation:** Fang L. What Online Traditional Medicine Dictionaries Bring To English Speakers Now? Concepts or Equivalents? Open Access Maced J Med Sci. 2018 May 20; 6(5):859-863. https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2018.155

**Keywords:** Traditional Chinese medicine; Online dictionaries; Treatment; Concepts; Encyclopedia

\***Correspondence:** Lu Fang, Sichuan Vocational and Technical College, Foreign Languages Department, Suining, China. E-mail: shielafang19@yahoo.com

**Received:** 15-Jan-2018; **Revised:** 03-Mar-2018; **Accepted:** 05-Mar-2018; **Online first:** 15-May-2018

**Copyright:** © 2018 Lu Fang. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

**Funding:** This research is funded by Sichuan Foreign Languages and Literature Research Center (SCWY15-24) and China Scholarship Council (LJF [2014] 5049)

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist

Nowadays, more and more Chinese medicine practices are applied in the world and popularizing that becomes an urgent task. To meet the requirements, an increasing number of Chinese - English traditional medicine dictionaries have been produced at home or abroad in recent decades. Nevertheless, the users are still struggling to spot the information in dictionaries. What traditional medicine dictionaries are needed for the English speakers now? To identify an entry model for online TCM dictionaries, I compared the entries in five printed traditional medicine dictionaries and two online ones. Based upon this, I tentatively put forward two samples, “阳经 (yángjīng)” and “阴经 (yīnjīng)”, focusing on concepts transmitting, for online Chinese - English TCM dictionaries.

## Introduction

In 2015, the Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to Professor Youyou Tu, who found the active compound from a Chinese herbal medicine *Artemisia* to treat malaria. Middlesex University in the UK, the first ever university outside China to launch a traditional Chinese medicine degree, has now enrolled MSc students for more than ten years. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is gradually attracting more and more attention in the world. To meet the requirements of TCM development, an increasing number of Chinese-English traditional medicine dictionaries have been produced at home or abroad in recent decades. But generally, they cannot meet non-Chinese users' needs due to the lack of some indispensable information. For example, some dictionaries only provide the English equivalents without an English definition for the lemmas and some do not cover all the basic TCM terms in their entries [1] [2].

To identify an entry model for Online TCM

encyclopedic dictionary, I compared the microstructure of the entries in the following five printed traditional medicine dictionaries:

- A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary of Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine (DYECM 2011) [3];
- New Chinese-English Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Second Edition) (NCEDTM 2013) [4];
- Classified Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine (CDTCM 2002) [5];
- Terminology of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TTCM 2008) [6];
- Chinese-English Pocket Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine (CEDTCM 2003) [7].

and two online dictionaries:

- Paradigm Online TCM Dictionary (POTCMD) [8];
- Translation-dictionary.net (TD) [9].

## “阳经(yángjīng)” and “阴经(yīn jīng)” in Seven Chinese-English TCM Dictionaries

In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. Many tangible dualities (such as light and dark, fire and water, expanding and contracting) are thought of as physical manifestations of the duality symbolized by yin and yang. This duality lies at the origins of many branches of classical Chinese science and philosophy, as well as being a primary guideline of TCM [10]. Accordingly, a relevant pair of terms, “阳经(yángjīng)” and “阴经(yīn jīng)” frequently emerge in TCM books.

Huangdi said, “Yin and yang serve as the law of the heavens and the earth, the fundamental principle of all things, the parents of change, the beginning of birth and death and the storehouse of spiritual being. The treatment of disease must follow this law.” [11].

Huangdi said, “The meridians are not only responsible for the blood and Qi, but also are important for determining life and death, treating various diseases and regulating Deficiency and Excess. Hence it (author: should be “they”) must be thoroughly understood.” [12].

The meridian system is one of the basic approaches of pathological physiology in Chinese medicine, whereas yin and yang are one of the philosophical principles of TCM (Sun 2002: 8) [13]. Consequently, I selected two entries, “阳经(yángjīng)” and “阴经(yīn jīng)”, from five printed Chinese-English TCM and two online TCM dictionaries to compare their microstructure treatment. I also searched for “阳经(yángjīng)” and “阴经(yīn jīng)” in different online dictionaries; they are not listed in Wiktionary, Wikipedia, or Britannica but are listed in two online dictionaries, POTCMD and TD.

### Entry Treatment of Seven Chinese-English TCM Dictionaries

In the dictionaries’ preface, the compilers in NCEDTCM and DYECM claim that their target users are L1 users of Chinese, such as traditional medicine researchers, students and interpreters. In CEPDTCM, CDTCM and TTCM, the compilers highlight that their dictionaries are designed not only for the traditional medicine researchers, students and interpreters in China, but also for the L2 users of Chinese.

Taking “阳经(yángjīng)” and “阴经(yīn jīng)” as examples, I attempted to identify whether the seven dictionaries shared the same approach to providing lexical information, including Chinese pinyin, the

Chinese tone, English equivalents, an English definition, English encyclopedic information and illustrative examples in their microstructure. Due to the limited space, I can not present all the details of the dictionaries, but provide the results of this comparison in Table 1:

**Table 1: “阳经 (yángjīng)” and “阴经 (yīn jīng)” in TCM Dictionaries**

	English equivalents		Items				
	阳经(yángjīng)	阴经(yīn jīng)	Chinese Pinyin	Chinese Tone	English definition	Encyclopedic information	Illustrative examples
DYECM	Stomach meridian of Foot-Yangming; Three yang meridians	yin meridians	Y	Y	N	N	N
NCEDTCM	yang meridian	yin meridian	Y	Y	N	N	Y
TTCM	the yang channels	the yin channels	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
CDTCM	yang meridians	yin meridians	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
CEPDTCM	none	Yin vessel	Y	N	Y	Y	N
POTCMD <sup>1</sup>	Yang channel	Yin channel	Y	Y	N	N	N
TD <sup>2</sup>	the yang meridians; yang meridian; yang channels	the yin meridian; yin channels	N	N	N	N	Y

1, accessed January 15, 2018, <http://www.paradigm-pubs.com/TermList>; 2, accessed January 15, 2018, <http://translation-dictionary.net/chinese-english>; All the dictionaries provide the English equivalents of “阳经 (yángjīng)” and “阴经 (yīn jīng)” with different treatments, including pronunciation, definitions, illustrations and encyclopedic information. Five dictionaries present Chinese pinyin and tone; one dictionary only provides pinyin without tone and neither exists in TD. In POTCMD, both of the two ways, accented pinyin (with the tone) and unaccented pinyin (without the tone) appear in the treatment. The headwords are translated into different English words or phrases in these dictionaries. Obviously, even though there is some overlap among their target users, all of the seven dictionaries have their own microstructure treatment for the entries, such as varying translations different ways of representing tone. Furthermore, not all the dictionaries provide the following items, the English equivalent, Chinese pinyin and tone, English definition, encyclopedic information and illustrative examples. It seems difficult for English speakers to fully understand what the symbols represent or embody, which would not only hinder the users’ understanding the terms, but worsen the difficulties in users’ accessing process, or even restrain their desire in accessing the entry

## Analysis and Suggestions for Online Chinese-English TCM Dictionaries

Chinese-English TCM Encyclopedia users could be varied in their Chinese level. For example, some TCM professionals and researchers who want to keep up with the burgeoning array of terminology found in today’s medical news, some patients who hope to acquire concise and easily accessible information for descriptions of prescription medications, medical abbreviations, test procedures, medical research topics, or illnesses. Due to lack of culture background, the English speakers perhaps feel frustrated to grasp the meaning of culture-loaded headwords, or understand the tone symbols, 1st tone “—”, 2nd tone, “ˊ”, 3rd tone, “ˇ”, 4th tone “ˋ”, and 5th tone “ˊˊ”. Considering the fact that there are abundant of diversified English equivalents and obscure definitions for the same entry, encyclopedic information should be supplemented to provide some additional information to clarify the Chinese culture related items. Therefore, an encyclopedia, not a dictionary, should be compiled.

Henri Bejoint (2000) [14] holds the view that

the dictionary and the encyclopedia differ in the nature of their entries, their arrangement, and the nature of the information given in each entry. The entry-words of an encyclopedia are always nouns, both common nouns and proper nouns. But those nouns are not the subjects of the microstructural information contained in the entries; they are only the signs -- in the sense of road signs -- indicating the contents of the entries. They are labels attached to the entries for convenience of reference: typically, for example, an entry headed by the word garden will contain not an exploration of the concept, an explanation of the etymology of the word, etc., but a history and geography of gardening, an explanation of its techniques, etc. For many entries, a different entry-word might have been chosen, and this would not have modified noticeably the contents of the entry.

The compilers could attempt to set up a featured entry microstructure, which contains headwords, Chinese pinyin, tone, English equivalent, encyclopedic information, even some pictorial illustrations, and some hyperlinks to the reference websites.

### **Encyclopedic text**

“Users generally expect a bilingual dictionary to provide them with faithful translation. However, perfect equivalence is not always achievable .....” (Fontenelle 2015:53) [15]. The English equivalents of the headwords are not identical in the seven dictionaries. I think the point is that even though there exists a range of criterion for the English equivalents, for example, the WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region (2009) [16] and International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine (2008) [17], the compilers haven't strictly complied with that. Or, the English equivalents in the criterion can not cover all the technical terms exhaustively, which urges the compilers to find the equivalents by themselves. Consequently, different equivalents could be found out in a couple of dictionaries.

Three of the dictionaries provide the definition of the terms, for example:

阴经 Including the three Yin Channels of the Hand and the three Yin Channels of the Foot, Renmai (the Anterior Midline Channel), Chongmai (The Vital Channel), Yinwei Ma (The Regulating Channel of Yin), Yinqiaomai (the Motility Channel of Yin). ----(TTCM 2005: 66) [6];

阴经 a collective terms for the three yin meridians of the hand and the foot, conception vessel, thoroughfare vessel, yin link vessel and yin heel vessel ----(CDTCM 2002: 436) [5];

阴经 a terminology of meridians. Refers to the yin channels including hand and foot yin channels,

Ren Channels, Chong Channels, Yin springing vessel Channels and yin linking vessel ----(CEPDTCM 2003: 441) [7].

In such cases, the users would probably find there exist some beneficial information in the definition. However, all of them are made up of difficult technical terms, which still can not construct an image in users' minds. Consequently, some encyclopedic information is necessarily added to supplement the microstructure of the entries in Chinese-English TCM dictionaries. In the field of Chinese-English TCM dictionary compiling, an encyclopedia is more appropriate than a dictionary.

A majority of the TCM terms are culture-specific words or phrases, which cannot share the same denotation and connotation with western medicine terms. Consequently, diversified English equivalents could be seen in line with the same terms, and definitely, would lead to the diversified English translating treatments for the same term. Comparatively, “Encyclopedic definitions are more detailed and less vague than the meaning explanations offered in general dictionaries” (Hartman & James 2002:36) [18]. A dictionary gives a basic and short description of a (large) set of both trivial as well as non-trivial words, while an encyclopedia explains rigorously and provides background for a (small) set of non-trivial concepts and things in relatively large articles. Therefore, encyclopedic texts should be taken as an indispensable part of TCM microstructure. For users who are not familiar with Chinese culture, not a dictionary, but an encyclopedia should be provided.

### **Illustration**

Due to the cultural diversity, some TCM terms still cannot be fully understood after consulting encyclopedic texts in the microstructure. In such cases, illustrations can become another supplementary component for encyclopedic information. “There is enough space on the computer screen to enable illustrations to always be displayed at the same time as the associated word entry.” (Klosa 2016: 516,517) [19]. “This is generally effective when a written description of the external form of an object reaches its limits, and the visualization of the object in an illustration contributes to a better understanding.....it is generally the case that information is retained in the memory better when it is conveyed through the use of both text and images....illustrations can also be displayed in a (smaller) window which is opened separately; this is particularly useful when a dictionary is being accessed on a smartphone.” [20]. Illustrations can be pictures, audio or video material. By clicking on the interpretation of the text content in multimedia audio and video button, the users can easily construct an image of the TCM term in their minds. Here is a sample:

**灸法 [jiǔ fǎ]**

moxibustion: a therapy involving ignited material, usually moxa, to warm the surface of skin and meridian points with the intention of stimulating circulating through the points and harmonizing blood and qi. Practitioners claim it is especially effective in the treatment of chronic problems, "deficient conditions" (weakness), and elderly persons' diseases.

**Hyperlink**

"Online" is not a new word. Wifi covers a large part of the world. Consequently, an online dictionary, not a printed one, is needed. Compared with the printed dictionaries, the online ones have an additional feature—hyperlinks, which could present much more usage information. Hyperlinks could play a key role in a Chinese-English TCM dictionary. For example, the entry, "灸法" can also be found in wikipedia, which would definitely provide more supplementary information. Therefore, if possible, the compiler could try to provide some hyperlinks to sources such as Wikipedia, Wiktionary, Sacred Lotus, or the Encyclopedia Britannica, which could not only help the users deeply grasp the meaning of the entry, but also help them develop a framework for traditional medicine in their minds.

Wikipedia, catering for non-experts, is very popular in the world, and can provide a brief introduction to the basic principles in TCM. Unfortunately, there are abundant terms not included in Wikipedia, Wiktionary or Encyclopedia Britannica. Furthermore, anyone can add an entry to Wiktionary and Wikipedia. That can not guarantee the correctness of the definition.

**Chinese pinyin with tone**

Chinese Mandarin is a tonal language. In order to differentiate meaning, the same syllable is pronounced with different tones. Mandarin's tones give it a very distinctive quality, but the tones can also be a source of miscommunication if not given due attention. Mandarin is said to have four main tones and one neutral tone (Xin & Wang 2012: 53) [20]. Some dictionaries only provide Chinese pinyin without tones, or ignore both of them. It would be appropriate for the users who only need to understand the meaning of the term. However, if the users want to learn how to pronounce the word, they have to turn to other Chinese dictionaries, which is time-consuming.

Therefore, to meet the demands of different users, it would be better to add the Chinese pinyin with tone in TCM encyclopedias. For example, yángjīng, not yangjing, could be adopted for "阳经". The former is easy to understand and follow for the English speakers.

Furthermore, for the users who are not familiar with the Chinese pinyin or want to know how to read and write the Chinese characters, the compiler can provide a Chinese character stroke order, 一, 丨, 丿, 丶, ㇇, in the appendix or "help" column, in which stroke order rules could be provided. The proper stroke order is easily learned once a few basic rules are followed, which is similar to drawing on the board.

There are some popular online dictionaries in China, such as Aiciba, Youdao, Haici, and Bing. They contain a large number of Chinese characters in their microstructure, which could contribute a lot to the Chinese translations into English or TCM learning for advanced learners of Chinese. For the majority of non-Chinese users, it is frustrating to read such a block page filled with Chinese characters. Nevertheless, they still could be added as hyperlinks by advanced Chinese learners. I present the samples for "阳经 yáng jīng" and "阴经 yīn jīng" as follows:

**阳经 [yáng jīng]**

yang meridians: a collective term of hand and foot yang vessels, governor vessel, yang link vessel, and yang heel vessel. Meridians are classified into yin meridians and yang meridians according to the yin or yang organs with which they are connected [21]. The line on the inside of the body of the person is yin; line on the outside of the body of the person is yang. The interior parts of limbs belong to yin meridians, while the exterior parts belong to yang meridians.

**阴经 [yīn jīng]**

yin meridians: a collective term of hand and foot yin vessels, conception vessel, thoroughfare vessel, yin link vessel, and yin heel vessel (see also 阳经 yáng jīng).

In conclusion, online TCM encyclopedias are capable of not only providing the basic information about Chinese culture and medicine, for example, Chinese pinyin, Chinese tone, English equivalents, but also providing some encyclopedic information to fill in the gap of cultural background. They feature immediate cross-reference facilities, typically activated by a click of the mouse. By consulting online Chinese-English TCM encyclopedias, some users, for example, TCM patients can not only understand the denotation and connotation of the TCM terms, but also understand the explanations for various types of illness or symptoms given by the practitioners. Consequently, with the assistance of an online TCM encyclopedia, TCM patients might be able to interact with TCM practitioners more effectively, as well as overcome the restrictions in their clinical experience. For some technical problems, compiling a comprehensive online non-Chinese users' Chinese-English TCM encyclopedia is still in a trial stage. However, we should not deny the fact that it is an appealing and challenging task. It is safe to say that Chinese-English TCM encyclopedias for non-Chinese

users will continue to be innovative in the years and decades to come, which could bring more potential benefits to TCM's dissemination in the world.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to show my gratitude to Professor Hilary Nesi, from Coventry University, who provided a large number of remarks and suggestions during my paper writing. The research is also funded by Sichuan Foreign Languages and Literature Research Center (SCWY15-24) and China Scholarship Council (LJF [2014] 5049).

## References

1. Fang L. Entry Construction of Chinese-English Traditional Medicine Dictionaries. *Journal of Sichuan Vocational and Technical College*. 2014;6:64-66.
2. Fang L. Lemma Selection of Four Chinese-English Traditional Medicine Dictionaries, *Journal of Southwest University of Science and Technology (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*. 2014;6:81-84.
3. Li ZG. A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary of Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine. Beijing: People's medical Publishing house, 2011.
4. Fang TY. New Chinese-English Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Second Edition). Beijing: Chinese Medicine and Science Press, 2013.
5. Xie ZF. Classified Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2002: 435,436.
6. Shuai XZ, Chen DS. Terminology of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Changsha: Hunan Science & Technology Press; 2005:66.
7. Zhang TM, Jia B, Liao CD. Chinese-English Pocket Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Beijing: People's Industrial Press, 2003:441.
8. Available from <http://www.paradigm-pubs.com/TermList> 13/05/2018.
9. Available from <http://translation-dictionary.net/chinese-english/> 13/05/2018.
10. Available from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin\\_and\\_yang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang) 13/05/2018.
11. Anonymous. Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine Plain Conversation (Trans. By Li ZG). Xi'an: World Publishing Corporation, 2008: 56.
12. Yellow Emperors' Canon of Medicine Plain Conversation, Translated by Li 2008:188.
13. Sun GR. Principles of traditional Chinese. Beijing: Medicine China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2002.
14. Bejoint H. Modern Lexicography: An Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
15. Fontenelle T. Bilingual Dictionaries History and Development; Current Issues. In: Durkin P, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015:53.
16. World Health Organization Western Pacific Region. WHO international standard terminologies on traditional medicine in the Western Pacific Region. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007.
17. Li ZJ. International standard Chinese-English basic nomenclature of Chinese medicine. Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 2008.
18. Hartman, P. R. K & James, Gregory. *The dictionary of Lexicography*. London: Routledge, 2002:36,48.
19. Klosa A. Illustrations in Dictionaries; Encyclopedic and Cultural Information in Dictionaries In Durkin, Philip eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2015: 515-531.
20. Xin FY, Wang GS. *Modern Chinese*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2012.
21. Available from <http://www.shen-nong.com/eng/principles/distributionmeridians.html> 13/05/2018.