

## Translation of Character Names in Narrative Medicine Fiction from the Perspective of Identity Control Theory: Can Xue's *Barefoot Doctor*

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**Abstract:** Character names serve as a pivotal means of expressing narrative voice, particularly when derived from traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in contemporary medical fiction. However, they have received limited scholarly attention. Drawing on identity control theory, this study examines the Chinese–English translation of character names emulating TCM in Can Xue's *Barefoot Doctor*. Specifically, the study analyzes the production of character names through the lens of perceived meanings, cognitive negotiation, interactions with social milieus, output realization, and multidimensional feedback, forming a continuous identity control loop. By doing so, it reveals the mechanisms through which names, as cultural meaning-bearing symbols, are reproduced and negotiated in translation. The study not only elucidates translators' decision-making in cross-cultural contexts but also extends identity control theory in literary translation, providing micro-level evidence for its application in narrative and cultural studies. Limitations and future research directions are discussed, including the exploration of other narrative elements and broader social factors.

**Keywords:** narrative medicine, literature, *Barefoot Doctor*, traditional Chinese medicine, Can Xue, interdisciplinary

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### 1. Introduction

As a pivotal element in fictional creation, character names perform a diverse array of functions. Firstly, they serve to delineate a character's appearance, personality traits, and family background, thereby facilitating the reader's mental construction of the character. Secondly, they play a crucial role in captivating readers and evoking their emotional responses, drawing them deeper into the narrative. Thirdly, character names often function as knowledge metaphors,

reflecting the overarching theme, historical context, and sociocultural milieu of the work (Lefevere; Jan and Walter; Parianou). This multi-faceted functionality underscores the significance of character names in literary works, as they are not merely labels but integral components that enrich the fictional world in multiple dimensions. However, in the context of their translation, the long-standing debate has shifted from the question of whether translation should be carried out at all to the issue of how to translate them (Nahashon and Wangar). In this inquiry, a substantial body of comparative and contrastive translation studies has been carried out across diverse literary genres. These encompass, prominently, paintings and stories in children's literature (Sung et al.; Bardet), chapter-titled fiction (Wang and Liu; Yang), realistic fiction (Pogacar et al.; Guo et al.), and fantasy fiction (Wilcox et al.; Sarmaşık). These lines of inquiry provide fertile ground for the translation of character names in the aforementioned types of fiction. Nonetheless, as a significant genre within fictional works, medical fiction has received scant scholarly attention in previous research. Notably, this lack of attention is particularly pronounced regarding the emerging narrative medicine fiction that has emerged in recent years.

As noted by Rita Charon, "Narrative medicine enables the physician to practice medicine with empathy, reflection, professionalism, and trustworthiness" ("A Model" 1897). Building upon this assertion, fictional narrative medicine works, which are part of the medical practice of writing, not only mirror the stories that unfold between patients and physicians but also convey an aesthetic perspective, artistic coherence, and humane care (Charon, "Form" 83; Kleinman). As the field of narrative medicine garners increasing attention, there has been a notable emergence in recent years of fictional works within this domain. These works are characterized by their focus on the humanistic care shared between patients and physicians. Researchers have proffered several compelling insights regarding the genre. For example, Joshua Carr Rowland delved into the use of medicine depicted therein. Subsequently, Benedetta Liorsi examined disease-prevention methods as gleaned from the characters. In a different vein, Priscilla Wald concentrated on the improvement of medical ethics as represented in fictional works. John Carlo Pasco and Gale Temple explored issues of race and gender justice, while Yu Xuying analyzed the challenges posed to medical discourse. This body of research collectively enriches readers' understanding of the multifaceted intersections between literature and various aspects of medical and social issues. Such enquiries cast more light on future investigations into medical fiction research, particularly in relation to social issues, particularly with respect to social issues and their moral and ethical dimensions, as both medical and social concerns transcend national borders. This absence hints that a systematic investigation of these phenomena is not only essential but also necessary within a cross-cultural context. Character names, serving as a distinct marker of a character's identity and a symbol of the convergence of social values and cultural elements, indubitably assume a pivotal role in this regard.

Acclaimed as one of the masterworks of Can Xue, who has been referred to as "China's Kafka" (Zeng and Hu 162), *Barefoot Doctor* was penned in 2019. The work presents a fictional narrative of barefoot doctors, a unique group in the rural healthcare system of China, holding a common conviction regarding traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Despite the challenging medical environment, healthcare providers maintain a profound regard for Chinese herbal medicine and demonstrate a benevolent approach towards patients. This literary work is widely acknowledged as one of the preeminent exemplars of 21st century narrative medicine fiction. More importantly, it encapsulates a quintessential naturalistic perspective on TCM and embodies the spirit of medical humanities (Guo, "Medical Humanities" 297). One particularly salient

characteristic lies in the creatively devised character naming that is firmly grounded in TCM. These names, therefore, possess their own distinct meanings (Sun and Jiang 1), and simultaneously carry the inherent identification of medical culture. The initial Chinese–English translation of this work, rendered by Karen Gernant and Zeping Chen (hereinafter referred to as “Gernant and Chen”), was published in 2022. When juxtaposed with the Chinese version, the English rendition has garnered scant attention within the current academic community. This lack of interest extends even to the treatment of character names, which have received negligible scrutiny in contrast. It is important to note that these designations prove conducive to delving into the ways in which translators grapple with the characteristics of source texts to foster cross-cultural recognition. Consequently, in the contemporary international context, the investigation is of paramount importance for the establishment of a cultural community with a shared future. To fill these critical research gaps, the present study attempts to deploy identity control theory to scrutinize how the translators translate these character names in the *Barefoot Doctor*.

## 2. Identity Control Theory

Identity control theory posits that an identity constitutes a set of meanings. These meanings represent customary conceptions when individuals are confronted with the same stimulus (Mead, *Mind, 1st Edition*; Stryker; Stryker and Burke). These meanings manifest cultural commonalities and individual characteristics within particular semantic dimensions. In the context of social interaction, they contribute to the formation of a stable self-concept associated with the same social role (Liang 83). As such, scholars utilize this theory to examine the role identity process in public communities (e.g., Ruiz et al.; Naseer et al.; Eyal and Berkovich). However, regarding the oretical core, various viewpoints exist. Therein, the identity control system proposed by Peter J. Burke has garnered extensive recognition within the academic community (“Identity”). This system elucidates the interaction process of meanings. As depicted in Figure 1, the process is composed of social situation, comparator, input, and output, forming a meaning loop. Its identity standard represents the expected meanings associated with a particular role. This standard interacts with the horizon of expectation and is continuously negotiated with other participants through social interaction.

At the beginning of the model, individual control focuses on cognitively processing the meaning of inputted information, rather than the information itself. This process highlights the move from simply handling information to actively engaging with its meaning. This cognitive construction of meaning may either align with or diverge from the current context and the semantic representations of other roles in memory, functioning as a comparator. At the same time, the identity standard exerts a dominant influence over the comparator. Upon further examination, error signals arise to trigger new meaning construction for output whenever prior interpretations fail to align with the intended direction and intensity anticipated by receivers (Burke and Stets; Liang). Simultaneously, these interactions influence the corresponding social environment, within which importers and receivers construct identity (Burke, “Identities”). Once received, these appraisals are communicated through positive, negative, or neutral symbolic meanings, which in turn influence subsequent meaning input.

Note that the initial meanings of symbols pervade the entire social interaction process. They

evoke role identity among participants through the collective sharing of cultural knowledge (Burke, “Identity”; Mead, *Mind, Definitive Edition*). In this vein, similarity in meaning cognition and the universality of meanings across cultures reinforce role identity. However, the diverse cultural knowledge backdrops, status levels, and competencies of different roles may precipitate conflicts under varying circumstances. In this context, the control system offers an analytical lens for examining meaning conveyance among these roles. Consequently, this system has seen limited application in cross-cultural identity research, particularly in translation studies. To the best of our knowledge, prior literature primarily focused on moral and emotional issues amenable to resolution based on the identity control system (e.g., Mendosa; Cerda-Navarro et al.; Mueller et al.). For example, Lea Mueller et al., based on this system, developed a theoretical model. This model unpacks how stakeholders navigate identity work tensions by engaging in specific identity work activities.

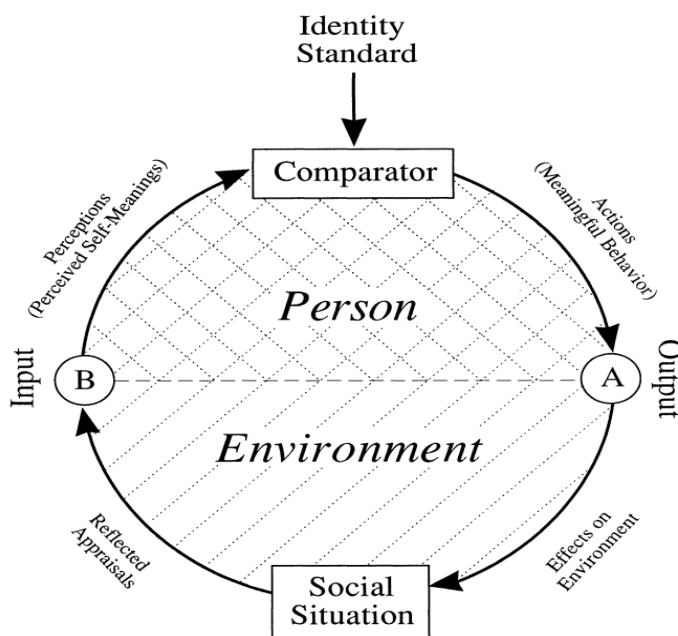


Figure 1. Control system view of the identity process (Burke, “Identity”)

Drawing upon Burke’s identity control system (“Identity”), the translation of literary texts can be conceptualized as a continuous loop comprising social situation, input, comparator, output, and feedback (see Figure 2). In this system, first, the social situation provides the contextual framework in which identity meanings are realized. It permeates all three stages rather than constituting a discrete step. Thus, the social situation encompasses discourse conventions, narrative ethics, cultural norms, and the reception context of target readers. These factors shape how translators interpret character names and evaluate their social and moral implications, directly influencing narrative coherence and character portrayal.

Furthermore, input refers to the meanings entering the translator’s cognitive system, emphasizing symbolic, cultural, and narrative significance. This includes the semantic,

metaphorical, and role-related cues embedded in character names, such as professional, ethical, or familial associations. Translators process these inputs by drawing on prior knowledge, translation experience, and cross-cultural understanding. This cognitive process forms the basis for decisions about how to convey character identities in the target text.

In the process, the comparator serves as a decision-making mechanism. It assesses whether the interpreted input aligns with identity standards and target reader expectations. This involves predicting how readers will perceive character roles, functions, and moral positioning. It also requires identifying discrepancies between the interpreted input and the expected identity standards. These discrepancies may trigger corrective signals. These signals then guide iterative adjustments in translation strategy, ensuring that character identities are conveyed accurately while maintaining readability and cultural resonance. In turn, these changes guide translation choices, ensuring character names convey the intended social and moral meaning.

Subsequently, output represents the realized translation of character names. Beyond literal transfer, it embodies the translator's mediation of meaning, guiding readers' perception of role identity, narrative function, and moral positioning. Output also influences how readers interpret narrative development and engage with the text.

Notably, feedback, as a key moderator, closes the loop by capturing reader reception and evaluation, including comments, reviews, and interpretive responses. This feedback informs subsequent input processing and comparator judgments, sustaining iterative refinement in translating character identities and ensuring that the intended roles are consistently communicated. Together, these components interact in a continuous identity control loop, providing a systematic framework for understanding how translators negotiate character identity and maintain narrative coherence across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In literary translation, this abstract process of meaning negotiation is instantiated through concrete textual choices, particularly in the rendering of character names, which function as condensed carriers of role identity.

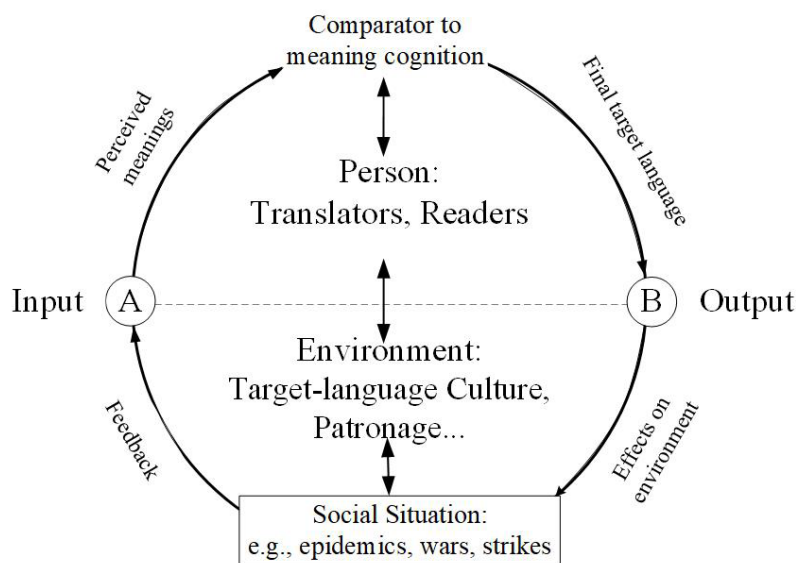


Figure 2. Control system in translation that was modified in accordance with Burke ("Identity")

### 3. Discussion

To ensure consistency with the modified translation model introduced in Section 2, the discussion is structured around the five components of the identity control loop: input, comparator, output, social situation, and feedback.

#### 3.1 Inputting Meanings

Within the framework of the translation loop posited in previous research, the perceived meanings are contingent upon both translators' cognitive frameworks and the relevant sociocultural contexts. Translators' perceptions are shaped not merely by their personal translation experiences and educational backgrounds but are also circumscribed by the etymological connotations and the intra-textual context of the source material. The sociocultural context, in the case of the dissemination of *Barefoot Doctor*, pertains specifically to the Anglophone world.

Regarding the translation and educational backdrops of the translators, Gernant, a student of Howard Goldblatt who has translated many Chinese novels written by Mo Yan,<sup>1</sup> is well-acquainted with TCM history and culture. Chen, graduating from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature in Peking University, is proficient in Chinese literature and culture. Based on their educational experience, it can be seen that, in contrast to those lacking familiarity with Chinese culture, when it comes to the integration of TCM culture within character names in the source text, such integration is more effectively preserved in the target texts. At the time of this book's publication, interestingly, TCM has demonstrated immune-enhancing efficacy. Clinically, it was seen to lessen the severity and mortality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this efficacy significantly evokes the interest of the audience to TCM in this fiction. Influenced by the aforementioned internal and external factors, translators construct perceived lexical meanings of character names and feed them into the comparator. To be specific, for character names directly derived from TCM herbs (e.g., 白芷 [*baizhi*], 细辛 [*xixin*], 罗汉 [*luohan*]), translators largely preserve the culture-meaning perceptions embedded in the original text. This approach was intended to attract readers' attention during the pandemic.

As a case in point, *Angelica dahurica* (白芷) was originally designated as "Baizhi" owing to its white roots and fragrant aroma, as noted by Paul Ulrich Unschuld. In ancient China, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, it was officially recognized as a type of herbal medicine, as documented in the *Agriculture God's Canon of Materia Medica*. This herbal remedy has been indicated for treating conditions such as cold—induced fever, headache, rhinitis, toothache, and other ailments (Hui et al. 1). Hence, the very name of *Angelica dahurica* encapsulates its chromatic, aromatic, and pharmacological attributes, as well as tracing its historical evolution. Beyond its intricate etymological connotations, in the present fictional work, the author of the source text has bestowed upon "Angelica dahurica" (白芷) a noble spiritual symbolism associated with barefoot doctors. Specifically, this symbolism encapsulates the selfless and wholehearted dedication characteristic of barefoot doctors in their medical endeavors. It should be noted that the original author, Can Xue, also assumes a pivotal role in the naming of characters in the English version. As Roman Halfmann stated, Can Xue, a prominent figure among the representatives of modern

Chinese avant-garde literature in modern China, intends to utilize substantial absurd images, narrative gaps, and existentialist ideas in the construction of her characters. She is committed to deconstructing the subjectivity of traditional character images. By doing so, Can Xue can scrutinize their existential states and delve into the subconscious of the characters. Specifically, her focus lies on aspects of human nature that are typically suppressed, such as free will, loneliness, and malevolence (Bachner; Halfmann; Moller-Olsen). These inquiries suggest that Can Xue prioritizes the spiritual world transcending reality and the psychological logics of the characters. Moreover, Can Xue herself has described her work as a “foreign plant growing in the soil of five thousand years of history.”<sup>2</sup> Such elements work in concert to foster the generation of absurd images within her literary corpus. In this sense, the translation of “白芷” in the original literary work as “Angelica dahurica” in the target text can be reasonably construed as an act of perceived meaning generation.

### 3.2 Comparing Meanings Cognition

When the aforementioned perceived lexical meanings are fed into the comparator, both the identity standards derived from lexical meanings and readers’ meaning cognitions come into play simultaneously. Therein, the identity standards accentuate the congruence between the etymological and contextual connotations of character names. In contrast, the reader’s cognition places significant emphasis on the comparable cognitive experiences derived from the meanings stored in their memory within the present context. The two parties engage in semantic negotiation until the readers’ horizon of expectations is realized. It is crucial to note that this expectation is analogous to that of the source-text readers. As such, prior to incorporating the perceived meanings of the lexicon, translators are required to empathize with both the characters in the source text and the target-text readers.

In addition to the internal negotiation and comparison, the external environment also exerts an impact on this negotiation process. Taking the capital environment as an illustrative case, “when the translator himself or herself lacks specific capital, in other words, when the power of consecration of the translator is weak, the accumulation of capital is handed over to other intermediaries who have more capital (e.g., patrons, preface writers, analysts, famous critics)” (Venuti 407–423). The translators, Gernant and Chen, do not enjoy the same high-profile status as eminent literary translators such as Yu Xuanchong, Gregory Rabassa, and Stephen Mitchell. This fact implies that alternative candidates could be considered for the comparison. That is to say, the initially perceived meanings of names derived from characters can be transferred to other stakeholders within the literary domain. These stakeholders include publishers, literary critics, and writers, as well as newspapers and magazines in the target-language environment. Collectively, these stakeholders constitute a capital network. In this network, the perceived meanings of lexicons are made to approximate readers’ cognitive understanding of meanings. The ultimate aim is to boost sales among the potential readership of the *Barefoot Doctor*. Step by step, the identity construction of the two parties is accomplished, thereby enabling the generation of novel name meanings for output. It is worth noting that the process is likely to yield erroneous symbolic meanings as a result of failed negotiations.

An archetypal example in this context is “Old Onion” (老葱头; *Lao cong tou*), the first patient of “Gray” (灰句; *Huiju*). “Gray” is one of the principal successors in the medical career initiated by “Mrs. Yi.” As vividly depicted in the novel, “Gray, Old Onion asked me if you could help him with acupuncture. His back hurts a lot. He knows you’re studying to be a barefoot doctor, and he said you could practice on him” (Can Xue 80). “Old Onion” serves as a metaphorical reflection. From the moment he first enters the life of “Gray” in Yun Village, he guides “Gray” to become a competent doctor there. For example, the old man utilizes his near-death experience to enlighten “Gray” to persist in the spiritual pursuit of being a doctor, to bravely shoulder responsibilities, to cultivate empathy for patients, and to respect nature, especially herbal medicines. However, as regards TCM etymology, the Chinese term for “onion” is both “葱头” (*cong tou*) and “洋葱” (*yangcong*). The term “洋葱” literally implies that the plant is not native to China but rather has its origin from a foreign land with the character “洋” (*yang*; foreign). Structurally, an onion consists of multiple layers of fleshy scales, which can be metaphorically likened to the process of decoding. This botanical feature, in parallel with the etymological hint of foreign origin, enriches the potential cultural and semiotic implications when considering the plant within the TCM framework.

In regard to English etymology, the term “onion” was metaphorically equated with “pearl” in certain dialects. This semantic equivalence implies that onions held significant cultural and perhaps economic value, underscoring their importance and preciousness in historical contexts. In Western naming systems, common nouns such as “onion” are not conventionally used as personal names. However, they may appear in figurative or context-dependent usage, including occupational reference and terms of intimate address. As a result, the three semantic interpretations of “onion” diverge across various contexts. If translators neglect these distinctions during the translation process, it can readily lead to semantic ambiguities for readers. As noted by several readers on Goodreads, the name “Old Onion” strikes an odd chord and diverges significantly from the patterns of everyday life. In this context, the disregard for cross-cultural semantic variations inherently accounts for the peculiarity and deviance of the name “Old Onion.” Upon further examination, the cross-cultural semantic variations primarily stem from tenuous linkages within the capital network. This weak connection is likely to cause the ineffective negotiation of symbolic meanings.

### 3.3 Output of Meanings

Cognition of meaning tends to exhibit internal congruence, particularly when meanings are culturally shared. Accordingly, character names that carry such shared meanings are more likely to be rearticulated through translation in the target-language context. These meanings are enacted through translators’ interpretive and decision-making behaviors, which shape translation choices and facilitate the communication of intended identities. More precisely, a well-defined character name does not merely function as a symbolic label within the narrative; rather, it operates as a non-human “actor” that actively shapes readers’ interpretive and affective responses, including the orientation of interpretation and the intensity of emotional engagement.

Specifically, the character name “Simon” (四秒) offers an illustrative case in Chapter 20 of the English edition, entitled “Footsteps of the Times.” Under the Hanyu Pinyin system, the herbal

medicine “四妙” (sì miào), commonly used to treat dermatitis, eczema, and osteoarthritis, may be confused in pinyin with “四秒” (sì miǎo). In TCM culture, as posited by Peng Huai ren, “四妙” alludes to a well-established prescription composed of four principal herbal ingredients, while “秒” (miǎo) carries the connotation of rapid and effective recovery. In the narrative, Simon is portrayed as a devoted reader of medical journals and a promising successor, described by the director as someone who “has been asking me for the past year when you would start taking new apprentices. He’ll be a pillar of the future” (Can Xue 241). This depiction resonates with the widespread public esteem for barefoot doctors that emerged after the 1960s (Bachner; Moller-Olsen; Guo, “*Barefoot Doctor*”). This public sentiment was shaped in part by the “626 Instructions” issued in 1965 by Mao Zedong. In English etymology, “Simon” is associated with being heard and with qualities such as loyalty, wisdom, and reliability.<sup>3</sup> These connotations further align with the character’s role and with the ethos of barefoot doctors. Against this backdrop, by rendering the Chinese name “四秒” as “Simon,” the translator activates culturally embedded associations that enable the name to index competence, efficacy, and continuity in medical practice. The character name thus functions as a non-human actor that mediates readers’ understanding of medical professionalism and social honor, guiding target-language readers toward a favorable evaluation of barefoot doctors across cultural contexts.

### 3.4 Interactions of Social Situation

In the identity control loop, the social situation functions as an overarching contextual framework that permeates the entire translation process. At the input stage, it shapes translators’ initial perception of character names by activating culturally and socially salient cues. It also informs evaluative judgments in the comparator, as translators anticipate how target readers may interpret characters’ roles and social positions. These contextual constraints ultimately guide naming outputs, ensuring that translated names convey ethically, culturally, and relationally appropriate meanings.

This structuring role of the social situation is vividly illustrated in Yun Village. In the narrative, the appellation “Mrs. Yi” serves as a socially saturated identity marker. It reflects the noble ethos associated with barefoot doctors and situates her at the center of the village’s relational network. Through this social positioning, volunteers such as “Gray,” “Angelica,” and “Mia” are drawn into medical practice, demonstrating how social interactions generate identity meanings that satisfy both self-oriented and other-directed needs. For instance, “Mia” and her husband “Lohan” lease uninhabited mountain areas to cultivate medicinal herbs for treating patients. Their actions not only earn social recognition but also motivate younger villagers, such as “Simon,” to participate in the medical enterprise. Situated in rural China during the 1960s–1980s, these interactions make visible the networks of obligation, cooperation, and responsibility that defined barefoot doctors as a social group (Guo, “Medical Humanities” 301). For translators, this socially embedded network constitutes a concrete social situation that shapes how character identities are perceived and evaluated prior to naming decisions.

The narrative representation of barefoot doctors foregrounds their broader societal functions. These functions directly inform translators’ comparator judgments and output choices. In Chinese

history, barefoot doctors were central to the establishment of rural medical services. Their legacy continues to shape narratives of rural healthcare provision, public health education, and collective responsibility. When interpreting this social situation, translators can evaluate whether translated character names meet target readers' expectations of medical professionalism, ethical commitment, and communal responsibility. Naming choices therefore do more than identify characters. They reinforce social respect for medical practitioners and underscore a work's humane and educational aims. These aims include encouraging youth participation in medical work and transmitting herbal medicine culture. Both are integral to the social identity of barefoot doctors.

Moreover, the cross-cultural transfer of these narrative elements activates a feedback loop within the identity control process. Through translation, historically grounded social esteem for barefoot doctors is linked to contemporary recognitions of professional and ethical values. For example, the perceived effectiveness of TCM in addressing public health challenges, such as COVID-19 (Hu), provides target-language readers with a familiar social reference point through which these identities in the novel can be interpreted. In this way, literary translation not only reflects but also reorganizes social cognition across cultural boundaries, completing the identity control loop through feedback between translated output and socially grounded interpretation.

### 3.5 Multidimensional Feedback

Multidimensional feedback functions as a crucial mechanism in the translation loop, integrating diverse sources such as reader responses, sales and circulation data, and cultural interpretations. These feedback channels can guide translators in refining perceived meanings, aligning character portrayals with audience expectations, and supporting the ongoing negotiation of identity across cultural contexts. In this context, appraisals of character names in target texts are typically derived from multiple feedback sources, including sales figures, reader reviews, and library circulation data. For instance, statistics from Amazon and WorldCat indicate that, despite sales of approximately 10,000 copies and 556 library acquisitions, the work received a relatively modest rating of 3.38 on Goodreads. This divergence between sales, circulation, and reader ratings underscores the complexity of feedback signals within the translation loop and suggests that multiple factors, including translation choices and reader expectations, may influence reception.

Illustrative reader comments offer preliminary insights into reception patterns. One user, Marisa notes that the character descriptions did not fully resonate and appeared repetitive. Another, Mandy, observes that although the names are familiar, the characters feel distant from everyday experience. These comments point to a possible gap between narrative characterization and reader expectations. One area where such a gap may emerge concerns the translation of character names. Certain translated names may involve cross-cultural divergence in connotation. For example, "Ginger" (细辛) is the second daughter-in-law of "Aunt Yossi." In the narrative, she moves from suspicion and fear toward identification with "Mrs. Yi." This development reflects her gradual acceptance of the barefoot doctor role. In TCM, "细辛" refers to a medicinal plant associated with slenderness and pungency. These qualities align with the character's cautious disposition. In English, however, "Ginger" often suggests liveliness and vibrancy.<sup>4</sup> The difference in connotation may influence how readers interpret her personality.

In addition to semantic factors, the broader context of translation decisions may also shape reception outcomes. Translators' motivations may influence how feedback is incorporated into the translation process. Interviews indicate that Karen Gernant and Chen Zeping began translating Can Xue's work after editorial invitation rather than through a standard commercial commission.<sup>5</sup> They continued this collaboration over several years. This sustained literary engagement may structure translation choices differently from projects driven primarily by market considerations.

Taken together, these observations illustrate how multidimensional feedback operates within the translation loop. Sales data, circulation records, reader commentary, semantic interpretation, and translation context all contribute to reception. No single factor determines reader response. Rather, feedback emerges from the interaction of linguistic choices, cultural connotations, and institutional conditions. Character-name translation thus becomes one site where these forces intersect. Through this process, translation participates in the ongoing negotiation of cross-cultural meaning and identity.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study surveys the cross-cultural production of character names in *Barefoot Doctor* drawing on identity control theory. These English names function as a pivotal narrative voice, reflecting the translators' decision-making when negotiating diverse cross-cultural symbolic meanings within the identity control loop. Despite the dynamic processing across input, comparator, output, social situation, and feedback stages, translation does not invariably achieve complete success due to collisions in meaning negotiation. The study reveals the mechanisms through which character names convey role identity, social values, and cultural significance in cross-cultural translation. Significantly, this research not only sheds light on the translation of character names in narrative medicine fiction but also enriches identity control theory by providing micro-level evidence of its application in literary translation and cultural studies. It emphasizes the ontological characteristics of identity control processes and demonstrates their relevance in cross-cultural contexts.

Certain limitations point to directions for future research. First, factors within the capital field, such as ideology, poetics, political conflicts, sponsorship, and economic considerations, were not examined, yet they may significantly influence translation choices. Future studies could explore how these capital-related factors shape translators' decisions and the negotiation of cultural meanings in cross-cultural literary translation. Second, the present study focused solely on character names related to TCM, leaving other narrative elements, such as dialogues, plot structures, or spatial features, unexplored. Future research could examine these additional narrative components to provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation practices in narrative medicine fiction. Third, the collection of empirical evidence regarding translation feedback was limited in the current study. Future research could adopt diverse methods, such as online surveys, questionnaires, or interviews, to systematically investigate reader reception and provide more robust insights into the translation process. Overall, this interdisciplinary investigation provides

a systematic framework for understanding how identity and meaning are negotiated in the translation of medical narrative fiction, offering insights relevant to both literary studies and the practice of narrative medicine.

## Notes

1. To distinguish the names of herbs and characters, we add double quotation marks to the character names in the novel.
2. “Etymology of Onion.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, edited by Harper Douglas, [www.etymonline.com/cn/word/onion](http://www.etymonline.com/cn/word/onion).
3. “Etymology of Simon.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, edited by Harper Douglas, [www.etymonline.com/cn/word/Simon](http://www.etymonline.com/cn/word/Simon).
4. “Ginger.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-chinese-simplified/ginger](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-chinese-simplified/ginger).
5. See Chad Post, “Interview with Karen Gernant and Chen Zeping,” *Three Percent*, 5 Aug. 2011, [www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepcent/2011/08/05/interview-with-karen-gernant-chen-zeping-read-this-next/](http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepcent/2011/08/05/interview-with-karen-gernant-chen-zeping-read-this-next/).

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