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At the Crossroads of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Translation: A Profile of Dr. Bi Fanggang

Feng Yue[1,*], Feng Lin[2]

[1]College of Foreign Language, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou 350117, Fujian, China.
[2]School of Foreign Languages, Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trade, Fuzhou 350202, Fujian, China.

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[*]**Corresponding author:** Feng Yue, College of Foreign Language, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou 350117, Fujian, China.

Abstract

Dr. Bi Fanggang, a renowned physician, is the founder of Benevolence TCM Clinic in Jinjiang, Fujian Province, P.R.China. He treats a wide spectrum of conditions, attracting patients from far beyond the city who seek his expertise. The clinic's walls are adorned with silk banners of gratitude, while its online review pages overflow with praise. Guided by his own principles, Dr. Bi upholds the holistic diagnostic vision of traditional Chinese medicine. He advocates treatments that respect the natural course of illness and allow pathogenic factors to find proper release. Emphasizing the distinction between Chinese and Western medical traditions, he remains faithful to the Chinese approach of treating the patient as an integrated whole. Yet Dr. Bi is more than a physician. He is also engaged in research and public medical education, and he is also a translator deeply engaged with the challenges of rendering TCM terminology into other languages. Standing at the crossroads of medicine and translation, Dr. Bi bridges two worlds, extending the reach of traditional Chinese medicine through both healing and words.

Keywords

Bi Fanggang; Traditional Chinese Medicine; Translation

Dr. Bi Fanggang is the founder of Benevolence TCM Clinic in Jinjiang City, Fujian Province. He earned his bachelor's degree from Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, followed by a master's degree in TCM from Fujian University of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 2012, he also obtained a master's degree in English translation from Fujian Normal University, reflecting his cross-disciplinary interests. Now in his forties, Dr. Bi is already a renowned physician in Jinjiang, Quanzhou and Xiamen of southern Fujian, with patients traveling from other cities to seek his expertise. His clinic is adorned with silk banners of gratitude, and the Clinic's online review section is filled with praise.

Figure 1. Benevolence TCM Clinic, Jinjiang, Fujian.

1. Medical Practice

Dr. Bi treats a wide range of conditions. In pediatrics, he addresses ailments such as rhinitis, adenoid hypertrophy, cough, asthma, pneumonia, sinusitis, suppurative tonsillitis, hand-foot-and-mouth disease, herpangina, urticaria, eczema, constipation, diarrhea, poor appetite, excessive sweating, geographic tongue, tic disorders, precocious puberty, physical weakness, and developmental delays. In gynecology, he treats irregular menstruation, heavy or scanty periods, dysfunctional uterine bleeding, dysmenorrhea, leukorrhea, pelvic inflammatory disease, mammary gland hyperplasia and nodules, uterine fibroids, ovarian cysts, polycystic ovary syndrome, premature ovarian failure, infertility, pre-IVF conditioning, and postpartum care. In internal medicine, he treats conditions of the spleen, stomach, liver, gallbladder, heart, lungs, kidneys, and thyroid, including chronic gastritis, colitis, cholecystitis, myocarditis, pneumonia, asthma, coronary heart disease, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, hyperuricemia, rheumatism, rheumatoid arthritis, Sjögren's syndrome, cancer recovery (before/after surgery, chemo, and radiotherapy), and suboptimal health conditions. In surgery and dermatology, he treats eczema, urticaria, acne, sores, and erysipelas (BTCIQ, 2022). He earned his reputation with his efficiency in treatment. So it is worthwhile to be acquainted with his medical philosophy.

Dr. Bi has his own principles. Firstly, he believes in maintaining the holistic diagnostic perspective of traditional Chinese medicine, without dividing patients strictly by specialty (internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, etc.). Secondly, he opposes the mindset of "treating fever to reduce fever, treating cough to stop cough." Instead, he advocates for treatments that follow the natural course of illness and allow pathogenic factors a proper outlet. Thirdly, he treats skin diseases such as eczema and urticaria through internal methods with an aim to address both the root cause and symptoms. Fourthly, he treats pediatric conditions such as rhinitis, adenoid hypertrophy, asthma, and gynecological conditions, including irregular menstruation, infertility, fibroids and nodules by focusing on overall constitution improvement (BTCIQ, 2022). So his medical philosophy is typical of traditional Chinese medicine.

In an interview, he shared his opinion on people's traditional preference for older TCM doctors and bigger hospitals: "The efficacy of Chinese medicine has nothing to do with the doctor's age, the size or status of the hospital, or one's degree or title—it only depends on the doctor himself and the individual patient. Just as the saying goes: 'A mountain doesn't need to be high; it becomes famous with the presence of a deity,' A doctor doesn't need to be old; what matters is effectiveness."

Dr. Bi mentioned his teachers, who are celebrities: "My mentor is Professor Ruan Shibao, a celebrated TCM expert in Fujian. In the profession, nearly everyone knows him—whether government officials or everyday people—and he treated all patients with equal patience and meticulous care. This deeply influenced me. My teacher's teacher was the late National TCM Master Wang Mianzhi. I've only heard of his legendary presence through my teacher and online sources—I never met him in person." He stresses: "Being a doctor is all about treating illness; anything beyond that is secondary."

He made a point of the difference between Chinese medicine and Western medicine: "Chinese medicine is fundamentally different from Western medicine. Western clinical practice is highly specialized—the more prestigious the hospital, the finer the divisions. But Chinese medicine is the opposite. True Chinese medicine is not rigidly divided into specialties. A practitioner may have a stronger focus in one area, but typically treats internal, external, gynecological, and pediatric cases alike. Just like the great doctor Bian Que in ancient times, he treats most kinds of illnesses and considers the human body as a whole instead of separate sections. This is because the theory of Chinese medicine is rooted in the view that the human body is a whole. So when someone asks me, 'What illnesses do you treat?'—I often find it hard to answer. Because in practice, I see patients from all specialties. It just so happens that I tend to receive more women and children."

Dr. Bi earned his reputation comparatively much earlier in his profession, but he said, "I am by no means the 'miracle doctor' that some patients claim I am. There are no miracle doctors in the world. While I have successfully treated many cases considered difficult or severe—such as chronic rhinitis deemed incurable, adenoid hypertrophy recommended for surgery, long-term infertility, repeated IVF failures, persistent fevers lasting days or even months, pneumonia or bronchitis unresponsive to hospitalization, and uncontrollable diarrhea occurring over ten times a day—there are also times when I can't even cure a common cold in a short time."

And he described his treatment, which is, again, typical of TCM philosophy: "I think this is partly due to a doctor's skill level, but also because many patients lack a proper understanding of illness. Many expect an immediate fever reduction, instant cough relief, or a cure for a chronic illness within one or two visits. As a result, some doctors are forced to use antibiotics, antipyretics, or even steroids. I am not that kind of doctor. In southern Fujian, there's a

saying: 'The Luck of being acquainted with a TCM doctor is the blessing of the patient.' When chatting with fellow practitioners, we often sigh with heartfelt emotion: How lucky we are to have studied Chinese medicine! Not everyone has the fortune to encounter Chinese medicine. May more and more people come to know and benefit from it!" (BTCIQ, 2022)

2. Medical Research and Public Medical Education

Dr. Bi is more than a mere doctor and has been engaged in research. He and Professor Ruan Shibao co-authored an article titled "An Overview of Research on the Treatment of Hyperlipidemia with Traditional Chinese Medicine," which expounds the understanding of hyperlipidemia in traditional Chinese medicine and points out that the TCM category of "gaozhi" (excessive fat/grease) includes the concept of blood lipids. As illustrated in the article, hyperlipidemia is classified under various disease patterns, such as dizziness, with its pathogenesis characterized by a deficiency in origin and excess in manifestation. By summarizing and analyzing relevant literature, the article discusses three major directions in TCM research on lipid regulation: the use of single medicinal herbs, syndrome differentiation and treatment with TCM compound prescriptions, and therapeutic approaches such as acupuncture. (Bi, Ruan, 2010, p. 64)

He joined Professor Ruan Shibao in writing a textbook titled *Chinese Patent Medicine*, which was primarily intended for teachers and students of TCM colleges and universities, as well as clinical physicians. It includes over 400 types of Chinese patent medicines, analyzing the principles behind their formulation, therapeutic functions, primary clinical indications, and practical applications. The coverage spans from traditional forms such as pills, powders, plasters, and boluses to modern technologies such as controlled-release preparations (Ruan, 2009).

With his expertise and medical experience, he is active in public medical education. *The Haixi Morning Post* reported on January 12, 2018, about this (Ma, 2018). It quoted one of his sayings as the headline: "Stomach illnesses are caused by eating." It began with what was posted recently by Fangang on his Moments (WeChat social feed). "Today in the outpatient clinic, I saw nearly 90 patients, many of whom had the flu. To prevent the flu, I suggest everyone avoid crowded places, wash hands frequently, wear masks, and get enough rest…" Scrolling down, there is his clinic schedule, common knowledge about traditional Chinese medicine, how to give medicine to children, etc., all concisely sharing health information with his friends on social media.

The reporter learned that besides his busy outpatient work, Bi Fangang often replies to patients' various questions on WeChat during his rest time. He said, "Since patients come to me, I must give my all to help them recover as soon as possible."

"I believe that *qi* and blood are the material basis of human life activities. The body's *qi*, blood, body fluids, and essence all come from the spleen and stomach. If the diet is reasonable, there will be no illness or only mild illness; otherwise, there will be more and more severe diseases. Therefore, apart from routine health maintenance, illnesses should also be treated by regulating the spleen and stomach first—prioritizing dietary therapy over medication. This is especially critical for chronic disease patients on complex drug regimens: without protecting and strengthening the spleen-stomach system to sustain vital energy, treatments will struggle to take effect. Since stomach ailments primarily stem from bad eating habits, their management must be symptom-specific, with prevention always outweighing cure.

One patient said, "Our whole family comes here for health maintenance. Dr. Bi can be called our family's health manager." While Dr. Bi was attending to other patients, Mr. Huang, who was waiting for his turn, told the reporter that his child had frequently suffered from colds and coughs since age three, with wheezing each time. The child had received many infusions and treatments, but his physical condition worsened. Later, on a friend's recommendation, they consulted Bi Fangang in August 2016. Over the following year, Dr. Bi successfully managed the child's chronic cough and wheezing. Now the child is nine years old, no longer wheezes when coughing, and has a good appetite. "Dr. Bi often says that preventing illness is more important than treating illness; most diseases depend on '30% treatment and 70% nurturing,'" Mr. Huang said. Bi Fangang not only guides him on how to take Chinese medicine through WeChat, but also advises on food combinations during medication—what to eat and what to avoid. "He is a very trustworthy and good doctor." (Ma, 2018)

3. Translation Studies

Dr. Bi is thoughtful and open-eyed, an omnivorous reader and an inquisitive observer. His knowledge in TCM is just one of the arrows in his quiver. Far from being satisfied with this, he continued to study translation in Fujian Normal

University and graduated with an M.A. thesis titled "Studies on English Translations of TCM Terms under Etiology and Pathogenesis" (Bi, 2012).

This paper begins with an academic review of the history of TCM translation that offers the following background knowledge. The translation of TCM into English began in the 17th century. During this early period, the English translations of TCM primarily focused on three areas: diagnosis, acupuncture, and materia medica. These translations were mostly introductory in nature and lacked substantial content related to clinical treatments and prescriptions. It was not until the past three to four decades following China's Reform and Opening-up that TCM began to attract significant attention from both the international medical and translation communities. The period from the 20th century up to the founding of the People's Republic of China marked the beginning of substantive development in the history of TCM English translation. With the publication of textbooks such as Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion, nearly 200 works on TCM translation were published during this time.

Since the 1980s, the translation of TCM has entered a phase characterized by various reference books and English teaching materials. These laid a solid foundation for the future standardization of TCM translation. In 1991, the World Health Organization (WHO) released the Standard Acupuncture Nomenclature, and in 2007, the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (WFCMS) published the International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine. In the same year, the WHO released the *International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region*. These developments marked the beginning of a global standardization process for the English translation of TCM terminology.

This paper analyzes the main challenges and pitfalls in the English translation of TCM, which include the following: Firstly, TCM and Western medical terminology may appear similar but differ significantly in meaning, making comprehension difficult for readers. Secondly, modern Chinese expressions and TCM terms are often inconsistent in meaning. Thirdly, TCM concepts are concise yet highly variable in usage. Fourthly, there is a serious issue of multiple translations for the same term, which hampers effective communication.

The paper concludes that the difficulty in translating TCM lies mainly in the challenge of cross-cultural communication, and the disorder in translation versions stems from the lack of unified research institutions. Therefore, the standardization of TCM English translation is an urgent need. (Bi, 2012)

He pointed out that international standards remain inconsistent and are riddled with errors and oversights, although the development of TCM English translation has been rapid. This has led to frequent disputes among domestic and international scholars, increasing the difficulty and resistance to practical implementation. Given the profound and extensive content of TCM, its translation is a monumental and arduous task. The essence of TCM lies in "syndrome differentiation and treatment based on pattern identification," and its core is the understanding of etiology and pathogenesis. However, research on the English translation of this "core of the essence" is extremely scarce, and there is an urgent need for further study. Thus, the lack of unified standards and the neglect of translation research on etiology and pathogenesis have become the major contradictions in the current stage of TCM English translation studies.

The purpose of his study is to compare the latest versions of two international standards: the *International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region* published by the WHO and the *International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine* published by the WFCMS. Focusing on terminology and commonly used expressions related to etiology, pathogenesis, and relevant syndrome differentiation, the paper identifies differences and areas for improvement. Based on principles of scientific terminology translation, it explores appropriate methods and principles for the English translation of TCM terms. The ultimate goal is to develop a unified, accurate, and relatively standardized English translation standard for terms, thereby advancing the standardization of TCM terminology translation.

He uses a point-by-point comparative analysis to identify translation defects and puts forward personal views based on theoretical principles. On the basis of fully elucidating the meaning of the original text, the paper focuses on the perspective of Skopos theory and cross-cultural translation. It draws especially from Professor Li Zhaoguo's five principles of TCM translation and the translation ideas proposed by Wiseman and others. Each term is analyzed to reveal shortcomings and inappropriate aspects, and suggestions for improved translations are proposed accordingly. (Bi, 2012)

Dr. Bi also published an article titled "On the translation of TCM Term *Xu* and *Shi*." According to the article, "Xu" and "Shi" appear frequently in the classics of traditional Chinese medicine. They are not only important principles of TCM, but are also commonly used to describe the healthy *qi* and the pathogenic *qi*. Because of their rich meanings, there are many English versions for them, but they were both translated into "deficiency (deficient)" and "excess

(excessive)" in *WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region* (World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, 2009) and *International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine* (Li, 2008). The article illustrates all the meanings of "Xu" and "Shi" in TCM, and after analysis of the versions in the two books mentioned and states that "solid" and "empty" are more nearly appropriate than "deficient" and "excessive" (Bi, Yue, & Huang, 2012).

So, at the crossroads of traditional Chinese medicine and translation stands Dr. Bi, a young physician, researcher, and translator, bridging two worlds with his work.

Figure 2. Dr. Bi Fanggang.

5. Patients' Comments

As previously noted, the online review section for Benevolence TCM Clinic in Quanzhou contains overwhelmingly positive feedback, with over 30,000 Chinese characters of praise. (BTCIQ, 2022) The following shows just several comments.

A-Ting (February 18, 2022):

I'm not good with pretty words, but I truly thank you for the help you gave my parents before, and I've always been deeply grateful! As the saying goes, "It is the fortune of the patient to meet such a doctor." I still remember when my mother was hospitalized for more than ten days due to glaucoma and cataracts. Other than taking medicine and receiving IV drips, there was no real relief — her vision was still blurry, her eyes were swollen and painful, and the doctor even said her eye might have to be removed. This was not only unbearably painful for my mother but also shocking and heartbreaking for me. I couldn't bear to see her suffer further, so I resolutely discharged my parents from the hospital and brought them to see Dr. Bi. With the benevolence of a true healer, after a few consultations and some herbal decoctions, my mother's condition improved significantly, the pain subsided, and we avoided the trauma of surgery.

Later, because both my parents are rather frail and often ill, I had to seek Dr. Bi's care many times, making many trips back and forth. I had to take a taxi from Shenhu to my mother's home in Dongshi, then bring my parents to Qingyang Clinic. To be honest, our family was not in a good financial situation at the time, and for various reasons, I hoped for Dr. Bi's help in halving the consultation fee. To my surprise, Dr. Bi waived the consultation fee entirely

and only charged for the medicine, greatly reducing my burden. I am so thankful for this experience, and it made me appreciate and trust traditional Chinese medicine even more. Thank you, Dr. Bi, for your compassion. I sincerely wish for a world free of illness and suffering! I also truly wish you and your family happiness and health, smooth work, less hardship, and that you take care of yourself so you can help even more people in need. Grateful!

Lily (February 18, 2022):

If you all are die-hard fans, I think Dr. Bi would probably choose me as the "head fan." I met him by chance in 2014, when he was still the 1.0 version — full of both talent and good looks. I remember the first time I took my child to see him one afternoon, he told me only three people had come to his clinic that whole day. From that day on, the three kids in my family never again had to endure IV drips, escaped the surgical knives that Western doctors wanted to use to remove their tonsils, and time and again were spared my elderly mother's helplessness and anxiety.

By now, I've recommended him to tons of friends and relatives. From those early days when the clinic was empty to today when his appointments are hard to get, he has relied on his medical skill, medical ethics, and the proud integrity of a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner. As the saying goes, "Human life is worth more than a thousand pieces of gold; to save it is the greatest virtue." I wish Dr. Bi's clinic continued success!

Xia Xia (February 18, 2022)

Dr. Bi, I'm very happy to have this opportunity to once again express my gratitude! You often say that "doctor and patient are brought together by fate." For me, meeting you has truly been a precious fate and a blessing for me and my family. Looking back, it's been four years since we met. I remember clearly that before meeting you, I had taken my child with urticaria to almost every hospital in Quanzhou and Jinjiang, seeking treatment from both Western doctors and TCM practitioners. I pursued every rumored cure for hives, only to face repeated disappointment. The torment of endless medications is a sorrow known only to those who have walked this painful path.

So when I brought my child to you, I honestly had little hope — it felt like just another attempt after so many disappointments. But today, I am so thankful for that meeting! Since then, my children have hardly ever taken Western medicine, and our visits to you have become fewer and fewer. This reminds me of one time after a consultation, my child said, "See you, Uncle Bi!" You smiled and said, "Hope I won't be seeing you again!" I've always felt that's the best blessing a doctor can give a patient.

Over time, you have also become "Bi the Hero" in our hearts. I was surprised the first time my child called you that, so I secretly asked why. She said, "Because Uncle Bi is like the heroes in TV shows who always help us, so I want to call him 'Bi the Hero'!" It's a very martial-arts-like title, and such a true reflection — whenever we need help, you are there to give it selflessly.

Jianhua (February 18, 2022) – 16 likes:

My connection with Dr. Bi began in 2020, the year my father passed away. It was a huge blow to me both physically and mentally. For a while, I suffered severe chest tightness and shortness of breath. Since I was still recovering from surgery in 2019, the sudden loss of my father was a double blow, and I was at my limit. A friend introduced me to Dr. Bi. At first, I came with skepticism — he was the first TCM doctor I had ever seen, and I thought he might also be the last. But after about three days of taking his medicine, my chest tightness and shortness of breath improved tremendously! After some time of treatment, I was basically fine. Later, I remembered that whenever I caught a cold, I normally had to go on an IV drip. But in 2021, one cold was cured in just a day and a half with Dr. Bi's prescription.

Last year, my mom told me she was going to have surgery on her nose because it was getting worse. I asked her to wait and checked with Dr. Bi. He suggested a video consultation since my mom was in Sichuan. My mom was skeptical: "He is only in his thirties… what can he do? So many local doctors haven't helped." I told her to just try — her daughter wouldn't harm her. After taking Dr. Bi's medicine for three days, she excitedly told me she could smell sweat again! She told people in our hometown that local physicians couldn't cure her and recommended an operation, but the treatment from Dr. Bi—which she referred to as her "outside doctor"—actually worked. I'm so grateful to him. In fact, because of him, my mom was finally willing to come and visit me! Life is both long and short — I'm grateful to have you along the way (BTCIQ, 2022).

Taken together, the above narratives sufficiently illustrate the depth of Dr. Bi's medical expertise and the trust he has earned from his patients.

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