The widespread circulation and the contemporary uses of traditional Asian medicines have stressed the permeability and the syncretism of traditional medical knowledge, and the translations of vernacular concepts and theories of illness into ‘psychological’, ‘scientific’ and/or ‘new-age’ categories. Rather than considering this ‘medical melting pot’ as a proof of traditional healers’ quackery, I advocate here that this specific mode of interaction enables a better communication between the therapist and his patient. More specifically, some categories seem to play a key role in this translation process. However, they can be subjected to different interpretations and they can refer simultaneously to plural medical frameworks. Investigating the social use of these floating signifiers can inform our understanding of the permeability of Asian traditional medical knowledge and can provide insights about the issue of communication and misunderstanding in regard to the doctor-patient relationship.