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**Harmonisation of the self:
Narratives of older Chinese about
ageing, health and wellbeing**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

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in
Health Psychology**

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Siu-Chun Cannis Tse

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Abstract

The older population in New Zealand is increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse. While the New Zealand Government has acknowledged that these diverse groups of older people have their specific ageing processes, needs and expectations, there is a paucity of research conducted to understand their ageing lives and experiences. This research seeks to explore the experiences of ageing among older Chinese migrants through the lens of subjective wellbeing. Specifically, it looks into older Chinese migrants' experiences of happiness, struggles and challenges while they are ageing in New Zealand. Particular consideration is given to the role the self plays in the creation, restoration and preservation of a sense of happiness in old age. In-depth narrative interviews were conducted with fourteen older Chinese migrants from diverse backgrounds. The analysis was informed by the dialogical self theory, Chinese philosophical perspectives of *yin/yang* and harmony, Chinese conceptions of happiness and the self and narrative methodology to focus on the dynamics of the self, through which a theoretical link between the self and human experience of happiness is developed. The results indicate several factors that could enhance or undermine the participants' ability to live happy and satisfying lives. The enhancing factors included: the natural environment, social welfare, health, wellbeing of the offspring, and family, ethnic community and social supports. The potential hindering factors were: language barriers, transportation problems, crimes, and inadequate healthcare services. The central findings reveal that happiness is a function of the harmonious interplay and balance of different aspects (*I*-positions) of the self within a dynamic, complex and ongoing process of dialogical negotiation. Three prominent pairs of *I*-positions, including the "independent" and the "interdependent" positions, "*xiao wo*" (the private and individuated self) and "*da wo*" (the large self) positions, and the "devoted" and the "affirmed" positions, were identified. Examples from three cases show that happiness may be attained when these self-positions interact with each other in harmony. The research also illustrates that happiness is dependent upon the individual reaching a balance among mind, body and surrounding environments. Furthermore, happiness is dependent upon the balanced dynamic interplay between individual agency and the social structures of changing contexts and situations.

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