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**THE PRACTICE OF CHINESE MEDICINE
IN NEW ZEALAND**

**A thesis presented in
partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts
in Social Anthropology at
Massey University**

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ABSTRACT

Chinese medicine has been practised throughout history in a variety of forms in a variety of countries. This study is concerned with discovering the particular form Chinese medicine has assumed in New Zealand. Data was collected by means of an ethnographic survey of 39 practitioners and 130 patients of Chinese medicine from throughout New Zealand. The thesis explores three main areas: first, what types of Chinese medical practices exist in New Zealand; second, who seeks and supports Chinese medicine as a health therapy in New Zealand; third, the perspectives that practitioners and patients of Chinese medicine have on the practice of Chinese medicine in New Zealand. An attempt is made to balance quantitative results with the qualitative descriptions and observations of the research participants. Primarily this thesis has been written with the needs of the research participants in mind - to be an independent source of information for them. Currently, Chinese medicine has no legislative protection in New Zealand, and there are a great variety of practitioner groups and practitioners practising "Chinese medicine" (particularly acupuncture) here. The research findings suggest that the practice of Chinese medicine in New Zealand has many forms, and is frequently fragmented and mixed with other health therapies. It is concluded that adaptation to context, including the presence of "non-Chinese" therapies, is a positive feature of Chinese medicine that long predate its arrival in New Zealand.

KEYWORDS: CHINESE MEDICINE; ACUPUNCTURE; ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINES; ETHNOGRAPHY.

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I would also like to gratefully acknowledge the Health Research Council for its grant to Professor Trawick to conduct pilot research on the health cultures of Asian immigrants to New Zealand. Part of the grant was used to defray travel, accommodation, and other expenses incurred during this research. It was when the project was well underway that we learned that "Chinese medicine" is practised here by a large number of non-Chinese people! In addition, I am appreciative of the Kakano Fund grant from the New Zealand Association of Social Anthropologists, which has enabled the printing of extra copies of this thesis for distribution to the libraries of the different Chinese medicine practitioner associations involved in this study.

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PREFACE

I am not a practitioner or authority on Chinese medicine, consequently this thesis is not an expert's exposition on the topic. Rather, it is the product of fieldwork research involving observations of treatment sessions, interviews with practitioners of Chinese medicine, patient and practitioner questionnaires, and library research. As a researcher in the field of social anthropology, my position as a non-medically trained person with little previous experience of Chinese medicine, meant that I often wondered if I was qualified enough to be researching the topic of "The Practice of Chinese medicine in New Zealand". What I could offer to this project was simply an unpartisan approach, with skills in researching and writing about culture and society, an interest in Chinese medicine, and a Chinese heritage.

My interest in and choice of the topic of Chinese medicine arose due to three main influences. First, during my final year in undergraduate studies at university, I took a paper called "Systems of Healing", which opened my eyes to the different worlds of healing. During that year, we learned about the health practices and views which exist in different cultures, including Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, and Western medicine. It was then that I began to learn that "health" and "medicine" are understood and practised in many different ways, and my interest in and respect for healing traditions outside the boundaries of "Western medicine" grew. Before this, the healing worlds outside "orthodox" Western medicine were entirely invisible to me, as neither I nor my family or friends had needed to search outside Western "biomedicine" for health care. As a result of my studies, I began to see the important role that "alternative"/"complementary" medicine can have in people's lives, culture, and their attitudes to health care.

Second, the topic of Chinese medicine interested me particularly because of its approach to health and healing. I was especially interested in the theories of yin and yang, and the connection of our health and well-being to the wider scheme of things, for example, our physical, social, and mental environments. As I read through the translations of the oldest Chinese medical texts, the "Huang-di Nei-ching" - the Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor, compiled by unknown authors between 300 and 100 BCE (Kaptchuk, 1983:23) - I was surprised to learn that "Chinese medicine" has many incongruent and even

conflicting traditions within it. In this pluralistic tradition, the old is not replaced by the new, rather systems practised exist along side each other (Unschuld 1985). The more I learned about Chinese medicine, the more I became interested in understanding how it is being practised in New Zealand, who is practising it, and who seeks it as a therapy.

Finally, on a more personal note, being half Chinese, I was motivated to learn about Chinese medicine because it was also a part (albeit remote) of my heritage. This was important to me, as a researcher, for personal and ethical reasons. My maternal grandmother and other relatives, although they live outside China and have mostly settled in Papua New Guinea and Australia, do still seek Chinese medicine as well as Western medicine for their health care needs. Nevertheless, being half Anglo-Saxon, I was raised according to Western standards and culture, and my immediate family prefers to rely on Western “biomedicine”. So, for me, this project was a chance to explore and reacquaint myself with the other half of my distant culture and heritage. Therefore, my approach to this research topic, was not just a quest for knowledge, but also a personal inquiry with a motivation to connect with people and learn from them about a tradition that is distant, but also related to me.

Although the participants in this research project come from many varied backgrounds and viewpoints, they each in their own way celebrate choice in the health care options available to our multi-cultural New Zealand society - for the benefit of working towards good health for all. This thesis has been written for them and is dedicated to them.

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