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**Beyond Expert Knowledge? New Spirituality and Self-Healing Phenomena in  
Late Modernity: A Case Study of A New Age Group in Taiwan- The Course in  
Light**

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**Abstract**

This paper takes the ever-expanding New Age group in Taiwan – the Course in Light (CIL) – as a case study to explore issues related to self-identity and healing in the New Age in late modernity. While modernity directly impacts people's daily lives, creating problems concerning self-identity, it can be demonstrated that therapy as expertise is used as a means for people to reconstruct their self-identity. In this regard, this case shows that healing in the New Age can be regarded as an alternate source of expert knowledge, since it provides a holistic spirituality that helps participants heal problems vis-à-vis bodily, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions through a process of cleansing, purification, uplift and transformation which reconstitutes their self-identity. It is also a process of bodily 'evolution' in which the state and changes of their emotions by means of the 'feeling rules' play a major part. The New Age is all about self-reflexivity because it teaches people how to be themselves, how to find their self-identity, and how to deal with their problems, as is the case with CIL. In addition, it encourages self improvement through discipline and learning; it gives people the flexibility to fit healing into their busy schedule; it offers people the opportunity to bring all the experiences of their fragmented lives together into a single coherent view of life. Last but not least, New Age practices such as the Course in Light are accessible to everyone. Therefore, the New Age can be seen as a response to the problem of high modernity, as it helps the self to focus on the positive side of emotions such as love, hope, and tranquillity; it emphasises the value of harmony and situates the self in the cosmos; and it shows respect for the environment instead of encouraging the values of mere consumerism.

**Key words: the Course in Light (CIL), Expert Knowledge, Feeling Rules, New Spirituality, Self-Identity**

## Introduction

The case study, which I explore in this paper, centres on the Course in Light (CIL) because it is one of the most popular spiritual practices in Taiwan in recent years and is a part of my PhD dissertation<sup>1</sup>. I deal with the issues in this paper that concern the reflexive project of the self for New Age people in Taiwan. I deal with the way in which they reconstruct their self-identity during the process of healing, the way in which ‘feeling rules’ are embodied in the practice, and what the sociological implications are in late modernity.

In Taiwan, circles labeled as ‘New Age’ in the spiritual marketplace shows that people who are strongly involved in this field are seeking personal growth and development by means of various spiritual practices, study groups, or healing workshops. In a way, the reasons that Taiwanese people engage in New Age activities because traditional or organized religions in Taiwan cannot satisfy their quest for personal development and spiritual growth. By participating in New Age practices, especially relating to the idea of healing such as the Course in Light, people re-identify themselves by means of reflexivity in the process, and re-construct their view of life in terms of a new spirituality relating to the practice. Therefore, the case of the Course in Light will be presented as an example to illustrate the new phenomenon that is developing in Taiwan.

The idea of the New Age was first introduced to Taiwan from the US in the early 1980s, and since then, various healing-related practices, such as the Course in Light meditation, Aura Soma Therapy, Bach Flower Remedies, Divine Will from Orin & DaBen, Reiki Healing, Spiritual Massage, and Yoga have become increasingly active in New Age circles in Taiwan. In one sense, practices such as these support observations of the New Age in the West in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In another sense, however, they actually represent the prominent Taiwanese

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<sup>1</sup> My PhD research project is entitled, ‘Getting Healed from a Globalised Age: a Study of the New Age in Taiwan’, which I have been conducting since 2002 under the supervision of Professor James A. Beckford of the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, UK.

leader's preference for the topic of healing<sup>2</sup>.

On the aspect of healing, my fieldwork reveals that experiences relating to bodily and emotional transformation in the process of healing helps New Age people to reconstruct their self-identity, while enabling them to develop a seemingly self-oriented spirituality that actually contains holistic thinking. Since the meaning of the term 'New Age' or 'New Age Movement' has long been a subject of debate and remains unsolved puzzle among scholars (Hedges & Beckford 2000; Hanegraaff 1999; Heelas 1996; Kyle 1995; Lewis 1992; Sutcliffe & Bowman 2000, 1-13; Sutcliffe 2003; York 1995), I will not discuss the issue in this paper but regard the New Age as a new spirituality that cultivates spiritual awareness and personal development within a holistic framework. The 'Course in Light' group is thus regarded as one of the New Age groups in Taiwan that embrace such a new spirituality.

The principal methods of research I employed include collecting and analysing relevant literature as well as interviewing people who have experienced transformation through CIL meditation<sup>3</sup>. The tape-recorded interviews are transcribed and translated into English for analysis. First of all, I would like to discuss theoretical explanations for the issues related to self-identity and healing in late modernity in the following section.

### **Theoretical Examination: Self-Identity and the Issue of Healing**

The impact of modernity on personal identity has been widely discussed in social

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<sup>2</sup> As the founder and the first president of the pioneering New Age organisation in Taiwan - the *Chinese New Age Society*-, the prominent Taiwanese leader Mrs *Wang Chi-Ching* is regarded as the Mother of the Chinese New Age, and has clearly played the most important role in the emergence and development of the New Age in Taiwan. She has been working on promoting holistic thinking and the idea of healing as a means to build the *Society*. She has also been translating and publishing relevant books since she introduced the concept of the New Age to Taiwan. My fieldwork reveals that most New Age people in Taiwan learnt about the idea of the New Age by reading books of the New Age series in Fine Press that is mapped out by Mrs Wang.

<sup>3</sup> Forty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews for my PhD research project have been conducted from September 2003 to February 2004, plus another 5 interviews for my follow-up fieldwork from July to August 2004. Each interview was an average of 2 hours in length. The interviews are digitally voice-recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. 12 interviews are translated into English as data sources for this paper with the aid of Atlas.ti software because they are those who are most strongly involved in CIL meditation. I also participated in one of CIL groups for 4 months in order to collect information pertinent to the issues of emotion and embodiment.

studies (Giddens, 1991; Zilbergeld, 1983; Mold 2001). Heelas, for instance, examines New Age phenomena in relation to theories of modernity and asserts that one of the major problems derived from modernity is the problem of identity since it may cause some people both to isolate themselves from modernity and choose to embrace the New Age (Heelas 1996, 137-138). As an extension of this reasoning, an analysis of late modernity by Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991) offers a more in-depth examination of the issue of identity which is helpful in identifying the role that the New Age phenomenon plays within the context of modern societies.

According to Giddens, one of the most significant phenomena in late modernity is ‘the construction of the self’ (self-identity) as a ‘reflexive project’. As risk culture is a fundamental characteristic of late modernity, the process involves becoming conscious of the environment of risks, and of how people make risk assessments. Giddens concludes that the environment of risks in late modern culture includes: 1) threats and dangers emanating from the reflexivity of modernity; 2) the threat of human violence arising from the industrialisation of war; and 3) the threat of personal meaninglessness deriving from the reflexivity of modernity as applied to the self (Giddens 1990, 100-111). The third dimension of risks – ‘the threat of personal meaninglessness’ – directly relates to the issue of the self. In this regard, Giddens points out that personal meaninglessness becomes a fundamental psychological problem as existential issues have been institutionally excluded in late modern society (Giddens 1991, 9). In the process of the construction of the self (the reflexive project), risk awareness induces anxieties in the self that motivate it to colonise, or seek to control, the future (life plan).

Since everyone living in the late modern world faces various options in life, according to Giddens, and has to make decisions by themselves, any type of expert knowledge such as that in the natural or social sciences, in the fields of medicine, counselling and therapy, and in high tech is regarded as an important source of guidance. It is especially at fateful moments

that threaten ontological securities and involve a new life-plan that people supposedly refer to expertise to make choices. According to Giddens, people encounter expert systems such as counselling or therapy when the decisions taken at fateful moments are highly consequential (Giddens 1991, 143).

Arguments over issues concerning self-identity and the therapeutic phenomena in late modernity by Giddens give us insight into issues of self-identity and healing in the New Age. Three salient points can be concluded from his analysis: 1) modernity has an impact on people's daily lives and creates problems with regard to self-identity, therefore, exposing the pressing need for expert systems such as therapists. 2) various types of therapy are prevalent in late modern society; and 3) therapy can be used as a means for people to reconstruct or strengthen their self-identity. One question arises here, nevertheless. How similar is healing in the New Age to counselling or psychotherapy in this regard? And, in what ways?

My opinion is that healing in the New Age not only helps participants deal with problems of self-identity through reflexivity, but also it cultivates a sensibility toward self-healing rather than creating a client-counselor relationship as in the case of psychotherapy. In addition, as far as healing goes, New Age practices, such as CIL meditation, can be regarded as other kinds of expert knowledge which are oriented toward the present and not to the future because they involve a spiritual transformation which is beyond any rational risk assessment of the possible outcome of an individual's 'self-reflexive project'. I will explain this issue further in a later section in which I present the case study.

## **The 'Course in Light' Group in Taiwan**

### ***1. Emergence and Development***

The Course in Light (CIL) is a spiritual practice in which people meditate by means of 12 colours of light energy in order to achieve spiritual transformation. It consists of several

levels with a series of lessons. The material is channelled<sup>4</sup> by Antonette Moltzan (Toni), an American from Texas, who has been receiving messages from 'light beings' since 1971. It is reported that these 'light beings' are ascended masters from the Great White Brotherhood, the Order of Melchizedek. They are spiritual beings possessing a mind without physical body, and the teachings of the cosmic law they transmit help people to 'direct their souls into and through a more expanded awareness of self' (Moltzan 2000, 4). As a channeler of CIL, Toni experienced spiritual awakening and transformation during the transmission period, and she was healed of her chronic illness (rheumatoid arthritis) after practising light meditation for many years (Moltzan, 1991, pp.63-68). In 1977, Toni began to publicly introduce CIL to people in the US.

CIL was brought to Taiwan by Taiwanese American Vicki Yang in the mid-1980s. Having met Toni in 1983, she began studying and practising CIL the following year in Texas, a period when her life was described as 'confused and frustrating (Moltzan, 2002, p.169).' After learning levels 1 and 2 of light meditation, she returned to Taiwan in 1986 and spent one-and-a-half years completing the other levels of the course through self-learning. Later Vicki was asked to show the material to a few friends who were interested in CIL, and that is regarded as the emergence of CIL group in Taiwan.

In 1993, Vicki began translating CIL texts into Chinese, a project which lasted several years; in the meantime, she hosted a group of some 20 to 30 people who were studying the messages of CIL, and practising light meditation following her oral translation of the material (Moltzan, 2002, pp.168-183). Several other groups were gradually organised and hosted by people who had learned CIL and had become teachers during the 1993-2000 period. The Chinese version of the first four levels of CIL was published in 1996. Four years later, in 2000, a public presentation of the revised Chinese version was held in Taipei. The author, the translator as the spokesperson of CIL in Taiwan, and 10 other Taiwanese teachers were introduced to attendants; it was regarded as the first formal, public introduction of CIL in Taiwan.

As a channeller of CIL, Toni has been invited to Taiwan once or twice a year since 1998; during her visits she has given lectures, held workshops, and conducted personal reading sessions. CIL has also spread into Hong Kong and Mainland China from Taiwan since 2001. However, the development of CIL in China is still in its early stage; there are only a small

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<sup>4</sup> Channelling is a phenomenon that an individual (the channeler) maintains to be possessed by spirit entities that speak through the channeler. Channelling is normally processed when the channeler is in a trance.

number of people practising CIL by self-studying.

No formal organisation, centre or membership system has been established for CIL in Taiwan other than the website of the 'Course in Light Information Center' (CILIC) which was launched in 2003 as a virtual centre to serve as a vehicle for communication among teachers and adherents and which replaced the former, now closed, office of the 'Matrix Publishing Co.' Also, unlike other forms of New Age healing such as Reiki, Bach Flower Remedies, or Aura Soma Therapy that require certification for would-be healers or consultants, no formal programme has been instituted in Taiwan for people to train as teachers of CIL. With respect to the qualification of teachers, according to Vicki, the translator who introduced CIL to Taiwan,

*It is impossible to verify who is a teacher, and who is not. It is impossible to verify how much love the teacher has; there is no measure to assess it; people's minds have been changing... Some people perhaps have their strong egos at this moment, but you don't know... perhaps when he/she begins teaching CIL and at the time when his/her love comes out because of a deeper understanding, his/her own problems are healed. Therefore, ... as I said, this is the karma between his/her (teacher's) soul and students', which is not what we can assess. Therefore, I absolutely object to issuing any certificate, or to set any rules for teachers of CIL. The point is, just as the Bible, you cannot say that A can preach the Bible and B cannot. (13/10/03, P4)*

Currently, there are 25 teachers in Taiwan who keep contact with CLIC and regularly host CIL study/meditation groups. Of these, 16 are in the north (Taipei), 6 in central Taiwan (Taichung), and 3 in the south (Kaoshiung). Most teachers are employees of business or professionals. One is retired. They fall into two generations between the age of 30 and 50 years old; twenty-one out of twenty-five are females. In addition, about 200-325 people<sup>5</sup> are participating in group practices. As for the number of adherents of CIL in Taiwan, i.e., those who have learned or are learning CIL, it can be determined from the volume of sales of Chinese versions. By the end of 2003, about 7,000 volumes of the book describing the first four levels of CIL have been sold since it was published in 1996, while 400 volumes of the Chinese version of the higher level of CIL, the first three levels of *The Planetary lessons*<sup>6</sup> have been sold since its publication in late 2003.

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<sup>5</sup> The number is an estimate based on a source from CILIC, who reports that normally 8-13 people attend a class.

<sup>6</sup> A Taiwanese teacher of CIL told me that the manuscripts of the planet levels have not been published as books in the US, they have only been released as CDs.

## 2. *The Practice*

The light meditation is practised and learned by participants with the aid of the book of CIL together with a CD. It is a series of lessons comprising of 16 levels; and each series aims to cleanse and purify different 'subtle bodies'. According to CIL, the physical body consists of 5 'subtle bodies', which are the emotional body, the mental body, the perceptual body, the astral/etheric body, and the soul body (Moltzan, 2001, pp.5-7).

The first four levels are regarded as basic lessons of CIL and it takes at least one year to learn, each level taking 3 months for participants to complete. The advanced series includes 9 levels called the 'Planetary lessons'; the last 'Angelic' series comprises 3 levels.

Regular participants practise light meditation by listening to the CD for instruction every day at anytime they prefer, and by attending a group session once a week. The CD of the Chinese version for light meditation, for the first four levels, is about 38 minutes in length<sup>7</sup>; it is produced and recorded by Vicki Yang, the translator of the book, and the one who introduced CIL to Taiwan. People can learn the procedure of light meditation recorded in the CD by self-studying. Unlike traditional meditation, such as in Buddhism, where the focus is on 'emptying' the mind, light meditation is a process of reflexivity of the self by means of visualising 12 colours of light energy relating to 5 subtle bodies and 12 energy centres<sup>8</sup>. In addition, the procedure of a normal group practice contains three parts: sharing, studying, and meditation. There are usually about 8-12 people in a group meeting; it is held weekly for 2 to 3 hours.

During the group meeting, participants talk about their thoughts, feelings, and events

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<sup>7</sup> This is different from CIL in English, in which each lesson is accompanied by a CD; therefore, there are 24 CDs for the first four levels of CIL in English.

<sup>8</sup> According to CIL, 12 energy centres are connected to subtle bodies together with 12 colours of light energy, which are white-6 inches above the head in the soul body, gold-crown *chakra*, blue-brow *chakra*, emerald green- upper part of the throat, violet purple- lower throat, ruby red- heart *chakra*, orange- solar plexus, pink-navel *chakra*, amethyst- lower abdominal area, mint green- centre of the basin, scarlet- root *chakra*, black- 6 inches below the bottom of the feet.



which have happened to them in connection to the lesson for the previous week. After that, they read the text that is assigned as a new lesson for the current week. Then there are discussions and instructions by the teacher. Finally, they practise light meditation by following the teacher's guidance.

### 3. *Spirituality*

...this course draws you into acceleration that you can undertake to help you restore yourself to the truth and to the wholeness of your being.

Moltzan, *Open to Light*

As we can see, meditation of CIL is a complicated practice in which, according to its instructions, participants have to study the text lesson by lesson and focus on one specific colour of light each week. Although a lot of terms and messages from the Bible appear in the text of CIL<sup>9</sup>, the theories about subtle energy, *chakras*, and subtle bodies that are regarded as the basic framework of light meditation are found in ancient cultures (Kazanis, 1997)<sup>10</sup>, Indian Yoga systems (Hanegraaff, 1998, p.54), modern Theosophy and Anthroposophy (Hanegraaff, 1998, pp.221-223); the spirituality of CIL is essentially holistic but not dualistic.

For example, it teaches people to affirm their connections with a higher power in meditation, such as 'I am of one mind, one thought and one consciousness (Moltzan, 1973, p.13)' because 'out of one creative force came all. All are a part of the same creative expression (Moltzan, 1973, p.41).' In addition, most interviewees agreed with two statements in the interview questions, namely 'all life is interconnected energy,' and 'all is ultimately one, and thus, everyone has a sense of responsibility for others and for the earth.' A few examples of the comments on the two statements by the interviewees are as follows,

*It is the cosmic law that 'all life is interconnected energy (05/11/03, P16).*

*That's right, it is true that all life, including nature, is interconnected energy; even our meeting today in some way is connected to it. It(CIL) says that there is no coincidence in life (23/10/03, P10).*

*I often connect with everything in the universe when I practise meditation. It's very calming when you go into it deeper. You can feel that you are interconnected*

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<sup>9</sup> Messages from the Bible such as *Corinthians 1: 13*, the *Ten Commandments*, *Psalm 23(1)* and terms like God and Jesus Christ are reinterpreted in CIL from the perspective of holism.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of subtle energy is universal, and it refers to the primary force of life; it is referred to by different terms in different cultures—for example, *chi* in China, *prana* in India, *ankh* in ancient Egypt, and *pneuma* in ancient Greece.

*with everything in the universe. All of existence is One (24/12/03, P28).*

*You cannot escape from it. You will not feel good about your life if others do not feel good about theirs. That is the reason why one cannot be selfish and only think about oneself (13/10/03, P5).*

As for what the 'One' and the 'sense of wholeness' are, the Chinese translator of CIL explained,

*If one asks, 'What is the absolute truth?' Only one word can refer to it, and that is, 'Love'. That is the Divine; Love is actually the Divine. This is the absolute truth. If you think about truths in terms of dualism which is under the level of holism, then it(the truth) still belongs to the individual. The utmost truth is God is Love.... As long as everything falls below the holistic level, it is dualistic, which however cannot be denied or excluded from the material world where we live. As for dualistic truths, it depends on each individual to comprehend these by himself or herself (13/10/03, P4).*

Therefore, for healing to reconstruct self-identity, as the following section will discuss, light meditation enables participants to experience a sense of wholeness in the process of transformation. The sense of wholeness is connected to Love and God: 'Love is seeing God, feeling God, being God (Moltzan, 2000, p.250).' The source of healing for participants of CIL comes from Love as it says, 'teach Love, live Love, explore Love, become Love, and you will heal (Moltzan, 2000, p.255).' Therefore, although the practice is centred on the self and it helps participants reconstruct self-identity by means of reflexivity, the spirituality of CIL is actually a healing spirituality with holistic implication.

## **What do people experience from practising CIL?**

### ***1. Healing as a process of reconstructing self-identity***

After examining the history, the practice and the spirituality of CIL in Taiwan, one question is raised: what do people experience from practising CIL? According to the text of CIL, the goal is to help people understand, uplift, and transform themselves in light meditation. It is regarded as a process of healing whereby people cleanse and purify their light energy bodies, uplift their minds, and achieve spiritual transformation.

Most of my interviewees spoke about the transformation especially in the state of the body and emotions they experienced after practising light meditation for a period of time. One woman recalled her experience and said,

*CIL helps me cleanse and purify my aura (energy field) by the vibration of light; you are able to become clear in your mind only when you are cleansed. ...I was in a mess with regard to my body and emotions during the period of practising the first four levels. ...after that, I was getting more intuitive. When I moved on to practise the Planet levels of CIL, my emotions, perceptions, and my body were all transformed into a much better condition. It is especially when I was practising Planet 2 that I became much more stable than before. And then, I achieved a state of extreme happiness when I moved on to Planets 3 and 4... I healed every aspect of my past, my previous lives, and my spiritual will during the 3-year period of practising light meditation (13/10/03, P5).*

This exemplifies that healing is embodied when participants become aware of the subtle changes in their bodily, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions. It is manifested through their accounts of their experiences and, therefore, can be regarded as healing by the reflexivity of the self. It inspires participants to think about existential questions in meditation, such as ‘Who am I? Where am I going? What can I do to bring the message of wisdom to earth? What must I shed to be free? What must I gain or acknowledge to become strong? What must I see to have vision? (Moltzan 1991, 59)’; these questions continuously appear in the text of CIL through out all levels. It encourages participants to repeatedly think of these existential questions by reflexivity that are regarded as being fundamental to reconstructing self-identity. For example, one woman in my interviews mentioned how her self-identity is reconstructed while describing what transformation meant to her,

*...It (the transformation) also includes the fact that I learned what I want to do in the future and what my mission in life is... I am getting clearer and clearer about myself, I know what I want to do, and what I do not want to do. ... Before I practised CIL, I was a person who did not know how to refuse demanding people, and this really exhausted me. ...I feel that the whole process of practising CIL is to live your authentic self. Actually, I don't need to become another person; what I have to do is to return to the nature which is inside me (13/10/03, P5).*

CIL also helps adherents know themselves, and the meaning and purpose of their lives.

*I had been curious and wondering about questions such as ‘where did I come from and what my life is for in the world’ since I was a child. But, these doubts*

*have been resolved after I practised CIL (23/10/03, P10).*

*The greatest gain from practising CIL for me is that I know that there is a higher purpose in my life (05/01/04, P33).*

In fact, the implicit connection between self-identity and healing in (late) modern society has been explored (Giddens, 1991; Mold, 2001; Zilbergeld, 1983). With regard to New Age movement, Heelas, for instance, examines New Age phenomena in relation to theories of modernity and asserts that one of the major problems associated with modernity is the problem of identity, since it may cause some people both to isolate themselves from modernity and choose to embrace the New Age (Heelas, 1996, pp. 137-138). As one form of expression of Western culture, the idea of the New Age encourages people to quest for personal growth that centres on the self; and in a broad sense, 'the entire New Age has to do with healing (Heelas, 1996, p81).'

Other social research on the New Age, to some degree at least, has supported the statement that the healing phenomena in the New Age have not only become significant but have also flourished in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Albanese, 1992; Bowman, 1999; Crowley, 2000; Ellwood and Partin, 1988; McGuire, 1988; Sutcliffe, 2003a). Also worth noting is that Hanegraaff points out that healing, together with personal growth, is one of five trends in the New Age Movement (Hanegraaff, 1998, pp.42-61).

However, the way in which healing such as CIL differs from medical treatment is that it provides spiritual explanations for people who suffer from bodily malfunctions or emotional problems. For example, one female interviewee felt that CIL helped her conquer feelings of grief about the death of her brother;

*My brother's death was a big impact to me...but such grief feeling didn't last long because I was working with light (18/07/04, P47).*

In this regard, McGuire (1988) gives useful explanations in her research on alternative healing phenomena in suburban America. First, she finds that 'most people seek help and

healing not so much for disease *per se*, but for suffering and affliction (McGuire, 1988, p.241).’ Most adherents are initially attracted to alternative healing by the larger system of beliefs of which health-illness related beliefs and practices are only one part. This stand contradicts the view that marginal medicine merely serves 'as an alternative healing techniques to which people resort when all else fails (McGuire, 1988, p.5)'. Instead, McGuire notes that only a very small number of adherents initially come to their alternative healing group or healer because of a need to heal a prior condition.

In addition, data from this research reveals that beliefs and practices regarding healing for American suburbanites represents an expression of their concern for meaning, moral order, and individual effectiveness and power in their social world. In a way, it seems that beliefs and practices regarding healing can be seen as tools for self-actualisation and that the first step is to reconstruct or reconfirm one’s self-identity. The case of CIL confirms such observations as those of McGuire.

Although McGuire does not use 'New Age' as a category in her research, according to Heelas (1996), her research is of considerable value to the task of describing and analysing the New Age (pp.80-81). In particular, it is helpful to compare the category 'Eastern Meditation Groups' in her analysis to the CIL group in Taiwan because, on the subject of healing, there are similarities between them with regard to such notions as karma, illness and health. As one of the five main types of alternative healing, Eastern Meditation Groups adopt Eastern spirituality that emphasizes self-discipline while using Asian cosmological notions, such as karma and reincarnation (McGuire, 1988, p.97).

In examining the notion of disease or illness which is connected to the idea of healing, according to CIL, disease or illness is created by oneself. It is said that, ‘energy follows thought, thought directs energy, and thought magnifies energy (Moltzan, 1973, p.19).’ Apart from this, the idea of Karma is involved. For example, CIL says that ‘you choose the diseases of your life in accordance with a law that karmically connects you to the imprints and actions of your past (Moltzan, 1991, pp.28-29).’ However, some interviewees use such

scientific terms as DNA to explain the idea of Karma, which is different from Buddhism. As one female interviewee put it,

*Reincarnation is true, it is what DNA brought you when you were born, and it influences your life.... For me, at first I thought that I was the only one who is responsible for my consciousness and awareness, and so,...I criticise myself because I always thought that I think too much; later I realised that, ah, there is something about myself which is unknown to me; it is derived from my previous lives or from the moment I was born that I gathered all the energy with me to the earth..., it is possible (12/10/03, P3).*

In another aspect, the concepts of well-being and health in CIL are associated with the idea of the balance between the body, emotions, and the spirit, and one has to have trust in the body. The following excerpts are from two interviews; they illustrate adherents' self-awareness and sense of well-being,

*As CIL also emphasizes the importance of attending to our bodies, I really care about my body, because my body is the site in which my soul dwells. Besides, your cellular systems will be activated if your body is healthy, and a healthy body will help you to be more aware of yourself. ...so, a deep self-awareness is derived from the activation of the organic and cellular systems; therefore, the well-being of each of the bodily, mental, and the spiritual dimensions are actually correlated. You will be healthy in your mentality if your body is healthy, and your mental well-being will give you a positive attitude toward your spiritual well-being.*

*I treat any symptom as a signal to attend to my body. Your body itself knows better than any doctor in deciding what kind of treatment you need and how you should be treated. ...In fact, you will be healed as long as you have trust in your body (23/10/03, P10).*

*I am aware of each part of my body, emotions, mentality and spirit and their connections to each other; thus, I can keep myself well through self-awareness (05/01/04, P33).*

It is seen from the above-mentioned examples that the ideas such as balance, self-awareness, trust and flexibility are related to the notion of health to people who practise light meditation. Self-awareness is regarded as a necessary precondition to true health. It is through self-awareness that individuals can achieve self-fulfilment and become aware that

they are responsible for their state of being and illness. In addition, the concepts of 'energy', 'balance', and 'flexibility' are used literally as well as metaphorically. This means that the condition of the body both reflects and generates larger spiritual, emotional, and social conditions.

## ***2. Feeling rules***

As the above-mentioned, the Light meditation is interpreted as a kind of self-healing in which participants experience cleansing, purification, uplift, and transformation. In addition, we have seen that experiences relating to bodily and emotional transformation in the process of light meditation help participants to re-identify themselves and therefore reconstruct their self-identity. For participants, it is a process of bodily 'evolution' in which the state and changes of emotions play a major part. Here I would like to refer to the notion of 'feeling rules' proposed by Hochschild (1979, 2003[1983]) in her study of emotions. Hochschild (1979) regards 'feeling rules' as 'guidelines for the assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situation (p.566).' In addition, the way in which people identify and expect feeling rules vary in different societies or groups. Therefore, we can explore what participants are expected to feel in the group meeting and how they interpret their feelings according to the teachings of CIL in terms of feeling rules.

As a practice relating to self-healing, which is manifested when participants become aware of the influence of the light meditation on them by reflexivity. Healing is embodied in the way in which they share their feelings and thoughts with other people either in weekly group practice or by electronic communication. Normally participants regard emotional talks or emotional reactions as a process of cleansing. The following citation is from one participant A who wrote an email to the entire group members, interpreting how she felt about the event happened during a weekly session that I have also participated. She had an emotional reaction to participant B during the session. In the following email, A expressed what she felt about the event, how she interpreted her emotional reaction, and her gratitude to

B as well as to each member of the group:

*From: A*

*Sent: Friday, July 09, 2004 1:54 AM*

*The Subject: Thanks to B ~~~*

*Hi B,*

*It's A. I am sorry to bother you by this email. I would like to tell you that I am very much grateful for your contribution to me last night; you helped me evoke my feelings that has been repressed, that is, feelings of being misunderstood and of being rejected. Thus, I was encouraged and motivated to freely express such feelings that are deeply buried in my heart.*

*Although I was very annoyed at that time (in the group meeting); but when I stepped out the classroom, leaving the aura there, I knew immediately that I am in the process of cleaning(發 Fa in Chinese).*

*Therefore, thank you!*

*I would like to tell all my classmates that: do not be afraid, the process of cleansing in light meditation is just as our teacher said that, it is just as a process of striping an onion; the point is to be aware of ourselves. Thanks to my classmates and thanks more to B.*

*Thank you!*

*A 2004/7/08*

In my observation, during the session the teacher and other participants neither tried to stop verbal conflict between participants nor managed to calm their emotions. It seems that group members tried to ignore what was happening in the group meeting; the session was continued as usual, and participants kept on sharing thoughts to each other. In this case, 'emotion work' for other participants, to use Hochschild's phrase, is to pretend that nothing special or unpleasant was happening; it is an acting of 'ignorance'. However, such an 'emotion work' is acted in order to encourage participants A and B in the group meetings to feel free to express what they were feeling, instead of repressing their emotions. Emotional conflict between members is accepted, and positive meaning is given. It embodies the point of view about emotions from most New Age people I interviewed that, it is not necessary to repress, reject or lacerate our negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, aggrieving, hate,



emptiness— although these emotions make us suffer, it is temporary. Each kind of feeling has its own messages and meanings which is waiting for us to listen and to deal with. Each kind of feeling is natural, which is neither good nor bad; it is our attitude of acceptance or rejection that makes it positive or negative. Therefore, It can be said that feeling rules of CIL is based on this perspective: bring consciousness to your emotions; you are free to express your feelings because flow of emotions is a process of cleansing in light meditation. Just as the text of CIL states, when ‘...all of the emotional reactions to life, all the feelings that have been harboured and contained...is exposed to the light, there is a tremendous clearing that becomes apparent as you witness your emotional reactions becoming much stronger (Moltzan, 2001: 103)’, and ‘through your conscious effort in meditation you will feel the results of release and clearing (Moltzan, 2001: 105).’

## **Conclusions**

How do we explain the case of CIL in which people learn about self-healing in terms of sociological perspectives? I would like to expand Giddens’s analysis of late modernity with regard to therapy in order to conclude my discussions about self-identity and healing in the New Age in late modernity.

In his book *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), the British sociologist Anthony Giddens gives a detailed analysis of late modern society. Giddens regards ‘expert systems’ as devices that have superseded ‘traditions’ as guidelines for living in late modernity; for example, he argues that people regard expert systems such as counselling or therapy as an important source of guidance in life politics; it helps them make choices when the decisions taken at fateful moments in their life are highly consequential. However, Giddens limits therapy in late modernity to ‘psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, self-help and counselling’, so holistic healing is not included (Hedges and Beckford, 1999, p.174). In addition, although Giddens observes that a resurgence of new forms of spirituality and religions in the late 20<sup>th</sup>

Century ('late modernity') in the west is manifested, they seem to have no place in life politics, and only represent a 'return of the repressed (Giddens, 1991, p.207).'

In my point of view, Giddens's arguments omit an important aspect of late modernity, namely, the New Age. New Age is all about self-reflexivity because it teaches people how to be themselves, how to find their self-identity and how to deal with their problems, as the case of CIL. In addition, it encourages people to improve one's self by discipline and learning; it gives people the flexibility to fit healing into convenient times in a busy schedule; it offers people the opportunity to bring all the experiences of a fragmented life together in a single coherent view of life. Last but not least, New Age practice such as CIL is accessible to everyone. In this regard, New Age knowledge does function as an expert system for 'New Agers'. Although the New Age emerged from the West and embodies both criticism and expression of the very same culture (Hanegraaff, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002), the explanation of why the New Age is manifested is still applicable to New Age groups in Taiwan such as CIL. The New Age can be seen as a response to the problems of high modernity as it helps the self to focus on the positive side of emotions such as love, hope and tranquillity; it emphasises the value of harmony and situates the self in the cosmos, and it shows respect for the environment in terms of holism instead of mere consumerism. In short, the case of CIL group discussed in this paper shows that healing in the New Age can be regarded as an alternate source of expert knowledge in late modernity. It provides participants with a holistic spirituality that helps them to heal problems of the bodily, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions through a process of cleansing, purification, upliftment and transformation, and thus, to reconstruct their self-identity.

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