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**Self-Healing in a Spiritual Milieu in Contemporary Taiwan-- The  
Case of The New Age Group, The 'Course in Light'**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores 'spiritual but not religious' phenomena in Taiwan in which the New Age group, the Course in Light (CIL), is discussed as a case study. The idea of the New Age was introduced from the US to Taiwan in the early 1980s and has subsequently developed into a spiritual social movement. In Taiwan, it can be seen from my fieldwork that the idea of healing is particularly important to New Age people, and the Course in Light meditation is regarded as one of the most popular practices.

The Course in Light meditation is a spiritual practice in which people meditate by means of 12 colours of light energy in order to improve personal development and achieve spiritual transformation. It motivates adherents to experience a process of healing emphasizing bodily and emotional transformation. It is by means of the reflexive project of the self in a process of purification, release, uplift and transformation that adherents reconstruct their self-identity in the name of healing. In addition, the idea of the Course in Light identifies a literally self-oriented spirituality that includes holistic thinking.

The emergence of the New Age in Taiwan and phenomena that are 'spiritual but not religious' are significantly different from traditional and organised religions. It is worthy of examining in order to fully comprehend the relationship between spirituality, religions and modern society. This paper therefore provides a sociological understanding of New Age spirituality and religion in late modernity.

**Key Words: the Course in Light (CIL), New Age, Spiritual but not Religious, Healing, Expert Knowledge**

## **Introduction: 'spiritual but not religious'**

The subject of this paper, the Course in Light, is one of the most popular spiritual practices in recent years in New Age circles, which can be regarded as an embodiment of 'spiritual but not religious' phenomena among traditional and organized religions in Taiwan. I adopt the phrase 'spiritual but not religious' from the title of the book by Robert Fuller (2001) where he explores the historical background of what he termed 'unchurched religion' or 'unchurched spirituality' in the US, in which New Age is included. Fuller indicates that a large number of contemporary Americans identify themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' where spirituality is 'associated with higher levels of interest in mysticism, experimentation with unorthodox beliefs and practices, and negative feelings toward both clergy and churches (p.6)'. Spirituality in this regard is viewed as a journey closely connected with a quest for personal growth and development.

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 are similar to the 'spiritual but not religious' situation in America, 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.

Historically, the idea of the New Age was introduced from the US to Taiwan in the early 1980s and has subsequently developed into a spiritual social movement. However, since the meaning of the term 'New Age' or 'New Age Movement' has long been a subject of debate and remains an unsolved puzzle among scholars (Hedges & Beckford, 2000; Hanegraaff, 1999; Heelas, 1996; Kemp, 2004; Kyle, 1995; Lewis, 1992; Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000; Sutcliffe, 2003a, 2003b; York, 1995), I will discuss the New Age by seeing it as being 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. In this paper, I will show how the practice came to Taiwan, the way in which people became involved in the practice, what people experience in the process of light meditation with the idea of healing, what kind of spirituality it conveys, and its sociological implications in late-modernity. These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

Data for this paper is collected from fieldwork for my PhD research project<sup>1</sup> in which the Course in Light group is included, as one of the groups in my participant observation. The principal methods of research I employed included collecting and analysing relevant literature, as well as interviewing people who have experienced transformation through light meditation. The digital voice-recorded interviews are transcribed and translated into English for analysis.<sup>2</sup>

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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. I would like to thank Professor Beckford for his outstanding supervision of my project in progress. Thanks to the CCKF foundation for granting me the PhD dissertation fellowship in the third year.

<sup>2</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. Twelve interviews are translated into English as data sources for this paper, as the interviewees are those who are most strongly involved in CIL

## **The 'Course in Light' Group in Taiwan: history, practice and spirituality**

### ***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>3</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.

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meditation. I also participated in one of CIL groups for 3 months in order to collect information pertinent to the issues of emotion and embodiment; this will not be discussed in this paper.

<sup>3</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.

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 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 working in business fields or are 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>4</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>5</sup> have been sold since its publication in late 2003.

### ***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

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<sup>4</sup> The number is an estimate based on a source from CLIC, who reports that normally 8-13 people attend a class.

<sup>5</sup> A Taiwanese teacher of CIL told me that the manuscripts of the planet levels have not been published as

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>6</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>7</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 that 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

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books in the US, they have only been released as CDs.

<sup>6</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>7</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.

discussions and instructions by the teacher. Finally, they practise light meditation by following the teacher's guidance.

***A holistic and healing 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>8</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>9</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).*

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<sup>8</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>9</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.



*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 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.

## Self-Healing in a Spiritual Milieu

### *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.

### ***Healing as a Channel to Self-actualisation and Spiritual Transformation***

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.

### ***More Spiritual than Religious?***

Do practitioners regard CIL as a religion? In fact, all the interviewees who have been strongly involved in CIL have talked about their former religious practices in Taiwan

such as Buddhism, Taoism, Folk beliefs, and Christianity. Many of them have been involved in more than one religion before they began to practise light meditation. A few of them still view themselves as (Tibetan) Buddhists, but don't attach themselves to any Buddhist sects or organisations. Their opinions about religions and former involvement with them help distinguish New Age groups such as CIL from religious ones. A male interviewee talked about his involvement with CIL and compared it to Buddhism,

*There is a voice inside my heart...I strongly feel that...it seems like that I have been searching for something more spiritual. I feel that I have found what I want when I saw the title: the Course in Light. ...I come from a Buddhist family; both my grandfather and great-grandfather were Buddhist monks... my connection with Buddhism is therefore close. But it seems that it cannot attract me enough to get further involved (23/10/03, P10).*

One female interviewee recalled her involvement in religions, and commented,

*Later my Zen master also read many New Age books such as Krishnarmuti..., since then he has not been very orthodox(traditional) anymore. In fact, later on I was getting far away from traditional religions... and Tibetan Buddhism...they could not resolve my inner problems... I have truly resolved my inner problems after I got involved in the (Course in) Light (13/10/03, P5).*

Most interviewees indicated the difference between religions and the New Age; the following are a few examples,

*Some characteristics of religions have nothing to do with the truth; they are artificial, they are produced by the institution... Therefore, you would be trapped in the limitation(s) if you search for religions. Our way (New Age) is to seek for the truth; but we respect the existence of religions and we are also happy to see their developments (05/11/03, P16).*

*The difference between the New Age and religions is that, the former tends to encourage personal growth while the latter encourages you to follow its leading. Of course, they are the same in that they all encourage you to growth (laughing)! (24/12/03, P29)*

*The core tenet of the New Age-- if it is a teaching-- affirming that 'everyone is God' would be definitely accused by many religious people! And you will be immediately expelled! Well, it will directly put you to the arena, to know God (Lord): you heretic (laughing)! (05/01/04, P33)*

*I grow up in a Christian family and was baptized as a Christian ...but one thing I did not like about Christianity is that it excludes other religions...I wanted to search for my own path, so I was getting to leave the Church. ... Gradually, I thought about what the role of God is? ... I was told that every religion comes from one Source and I believe that. All religions teach people to be a good person but are different in terms of interpretation. As for the New Age, I think it is more open (16/07/04, P46).*

For those people who are strongly involved in CIL, the New Age is a 'spiritual but not religious' category; it is free from formal organisation; it helps them explore the self, re-construct their self-identity and experience personal growth in both secular life and spirituality. Therefore, participants of CIL are more spiritual than religious; CIL is regarded as a new form of spiritual practice instead of a 'new religion'.

**Conclusion : 'return of the repressed' or 'alternate expert knowledge?'**

How do we explain 'spiritual but not religious' phenomena such as 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, just as critics by Hedges and Beckford (1999), Giddens limits therapy in late modernity to ‘psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, self-help and counselling’, so holistic healing is not included (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 is the case with CIL. In addition, it encourages people to improve themselves through discipline and learning; it gives people the flexibility to fit healing into convenient times in their busy schedules; it offers people the opportunity to bring all the experiences of their fragmented lives together in a single coherent view of life. Last but not least, New Age practice such as CIL is inclusive and 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 as Hanegraaff (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002) suggested, it embodies both criticism and expression of the very same culture within it, 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.

The following long quotation (Moltzan, 1973, pp.331-332) illustrates how light meditation is used as a process involved in both self-healing and reconstructing

self-identity.

*Let the bodies respond to the healing. In the astral system, think in these terms: I know not what I am, what I created or what is in effect. I know only that the traveling energies of my consciousness have brought forth into these incarnation conditions it chose to re-access and re-express, to re-confirm, review, and bring into wholeness and light.*

*You truly are the pioneering energies to bring peace into the physical experience of living. The body that you live in, the temple that you share as your own living consciousness, the sacredness of this physical form as you, is being healed of many, many conditions, environmental conditions and emotional perspectives, from a lack of understanding. You are being brought through the fires of light into the experience of wholeness and love.*<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, the sense of the body is brought into self-awareness through visualisation, and the process is also regarded as a healing from experiencing love and wholeness by a feeling of ‘energy’ flowing through the body. 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, uplift and transformation, and thus, to reconstruct their self-identity.

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<sup>10</sup> The quotation is extracted from *lesson 39* ‘colour ray: ruby red’ in the fourth level of CIL. Ruby red energy is called the ‘left hand of the physician’, the ‘light of the healer/physician’ in CIL. Participants visualise the ruby red energy in meditation both for physical healing and emotional release.

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