

Symposium | Medical Anthropology : [Symposium 6] Remodelling Religious Remedies: An Anthropology of Healing Through "Feeling with the World"

 Thu. Sep 25, 2025 1:05 PM - 2:35 PM JST | Thu. Sep 25, 2025 4:05 AM - 5:35 AM UTC  Session Room 7  
(Conference Room C)

## [Symposium 6] Remodelling Religious Remedies: An Anthropology of Healing Through "Feeling with the World"

Moderator: Laurence J. Kirmayer (McGill University)

[SY-6]

Remodelling Religious Remedies: An Anthropology of Healing Through "Feeling with the World"

Andrea De Antoni<sup>1</sup>, Chia-hui Lu<sup>3</sup>, Xinzhe Huang<sup>4</sup>, Fumihiko Tsumura<sup>2</sup> (1. Kyoto University (Japan), 2. Meijo University (Japan), 3. I-Shou University (Taiwan), 4. Ritsumeikan University (Japan))

[SY-6-01]

The Becoming: Affective Technologies of Healing and Enskilment in Contemporary Okinawa.

\*Andrea De Antoni<sup>1</sup> (1. Kyoto University, Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies (Japan))

[SY-6-02]

Attuning to Divine Prescriptions: Affective Technologies of Spirit-Possessed Healing in Taiwan

\*Chia-Hui Lu<sup>1</sup> (1. I-Shou University (Taiwan))

[SY-6-03]

Feeling Inner Qi: Sensory and Affective experiences of Guo Lin Qigong in a Chinese Anti-Cancer Organization

\*Xinzhe Huang<sup>1</sup> (1. Ritsumeikan University (Japan))

[SY-6-04]

Expelling the Invisible: Ritual Healing and the Perception of Poison in Thai Traditional Medicine

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Keywords : Religious/Spiritual Healing、Socio-Cultural Anthropology、Affect/Feeling、Environment、Comparative Phenomenology

This symposium examines the theoretical intersections between religious and spiritual healing, phenomenology, and intercultural psychiatry. It addresses how certain conditions which resist biomedical treatments may improve through religious and spiritual ritual practices that engage sensory, affective, and embodied experiences. Drawing on comparative phenomenology, the symposium explores "feeling with the world" as a methodological lens to analyze religious and spiritual healing practices. This lens emphasizes contingent interactions between bodies and environments through practice. From these interactions, specific feelings and perceptions emerge as situated within healing practices and constitute the phenomenological ground for healing. Anthropological research has criticized biomedicine's tendency to isolate illness within the individual, often overlooking the broader social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of suffering. Cultural phenomenological approaches to healing emphasize lived, bodily experience as the transformative ground of healing processes, highlighting how perceptions, feelings, and selves are transformed through culture-specific and intersubjective relations with specialists and members of the sufferer's community. This symposium proposes a phenomenology of feeling that goes beyond narrative-based approaches. Rather than focusing solely on the stories people tell about their illnesses, this perspective prioritizes the sensory and affective experiences that unfold through practice. By focusing on situated engagements and correspondences between feeling bodies and (ritual) environments, the symposium sheds light on how healing emerges as a contingent and dynamic process. These bodily experiences, shaped by interactions with spiritual and social contexts, provide valuable insights into how individuals navigate suffering and seek well-being. By relying on ethnographic data in four different contexts, this symposium proposes a novel understanding of how an analytical focus on "feeling with the world" contributes to a comparative phenomenology of healing. It invites psychiatrists and anthropologists to consider how an understanding of the embodied, sensory, and affective dimensions, and how they are shaped by the environment, can complement and extend beyond biomedical models of healing processes.

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### [SY-6-01] The Becoming: Affective Technologies of Healing and Enskilment in Contemporary Okinawa.

\*Andrea De Antoni<sup>1</sup> (1. Kyoto University, Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies (Japan))

Keywords : Religious/Spiritual Healing、Socio-Cultural Anthropology、Affect/Feeling、Environment、Comparative Phenomenology

This presentation analyzes healing as a dynamic process of attunement and enskilment through the ethnographic lens of traditional spirit mediums and healers (*kaminchu*) in Okinawa, Japan. It focuses on healing from *kamidaari*—an often-distressing emergence of spiritual sensitivity—as a situated process that transforms troubling perceptions into enskilled capacities for perceiving and communicating with spirits. Rather than pathologizing spirit communication, I conceptualize the practices surrounding *kamidaari* as affective technologies: embodied and ecological forms of engagement—including prayer, visits to sacred sites, and ritual interactions—that generate correspondences with nonhuman presences in the environment. Through these practices, sufferers cultivate new modalities of feeling and perceiving, which reconfigure the phenomenological sphere of everyday life. These attunements enable those called to become *kaminchu* to “feel with the world” in socially meaningful and empowering ways. Drawing on conversations with local psychiatrists—some of whom selectively allow traditional healing practices—this presentation also aims at reframing psychiatric literature on *kamidaari* by foregrounding affective and sensory practices over pathology. Healing, in this view, is not the normalization of perception but its transformation through affective technologies that elicit enskilment via situated, embodied engagements. By tracing how *kaminchu* come to inhabit new modalities of feeling, the presentation contributes to a phenomenology of healing that emphasizes processual affective transformation and ecological enskilment. It invites a reconsideration of how healing may emerge not in spite of altered perception, but through its cultivation within relational ecologies and contingent ritual and affective practices.

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Moderator: Laurence J. Kirmayer (McGill University)

### [SY-6-02] Attuning to Divine Prescriptions: Affective Technologies of Spirit-Possessed Healing in Taiwan

\*Chia-Hui Lu<sup>1</sup> (1. I-Shou University (Taiwan))

Keywords : spirit possession、affective technologies、sensory healing、dynamic feeling process、Taiwanese vernacular medicine

This paper examines spirit-possessed healing in Taiwanese vernacular medicine as an affective and sensory process. Focusing on ritual contexts where jitong (spirit mediums) prescribe herbal and ritual remedies while possessed by deities, I conceptualize these divine prescriptions as affective technologies: embodied and ecological practices that generate new ways of sensing illness and well-being. Drawing on ethnographic research at a healing temple, I analyze how patients experience divine presence through tactile, olfactory, and affective engagements—such as feeling a deity's "cooling touch" during ritual diagnosis, sensing the vitality of herbs, or experiencing bodily lightness after consuming deity-prescribed remedies. These practices are not merely biomedical alternatives but situated processes that reshape patients' perceptual and emotional worlds, fostering trust and transforming distressing bodily sensations into signs of healing. By highlighting this dynamic process of feeling, I argue that spirit-possessed healing offers a phenomenological understanding of how bodies, deities, and ritual environments correspond in contingent and socially meaningful ways.

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Moderator: Laurence J. Kirmayer (McGill University)

### [SY-6-03] Feeling Inner Qi: Sensory and Affective experiences of Guo Lin Qigong in a Chinese Anti-Cancer Organization

\*Xinzhe Huang<sup>1</sup> (1. Ritsumeikan University (Japan))

Keywords : qigong, cancer, affect

This presentation examines the practice of Guo Lin Qigong within a grassroots anti-cancer organization in China, focusing on the generation and transformation of bodily sensations and affect. Guo Lin Qigong has become a central therapeutic modality among many contemporary anti-cancer groups across China, with an estimated ten million individuals having engaged in its practice. Distinct from other qigong forms, it explicitly targets a specific illness, cancer, and places the unique concept of *neiqi* (inner qi) at the core of its healing system. While its founder, Guo Lin, drew upon traditional qigong theory and classical Chinese medicine, she also actively incorporated contemporary scientific discourses to construct a multifaceted understanding of *neiqi* and its therapeutic efficacy. Recent anthropological studies of spiritual healing have increasingly shifted focus from symbolic interpretation to the sensory and affective dimensions of experience. Within this framework, *neiqi* is not merely an abstract concept but emerges through practitioners' embodied, lived experience. This presentation explores how *neiqi* becomes meaningful through specific bodily techniques and therapeutic processes aimed at cancer, and how these practices evoke and shape affective experiences. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I analyze how Guo Lin Qigong mobilizes sensory and emotional experiences, contributing to participants' perceptions of healing. By examining these embodied dynamics, I aim to elucidate how the therapeutic efficacy of Guo Lin Qigong emerges through "feeling with" both the techniques and the environments of practice, resonating with the symposium's broader framework of healing as contingent, affective, and relational.

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### [SY-6-04] Expelling the Invisible: Ritual Healing and the Perception of Poison in Thai Traditional Medicine

\*Fumihiko Tsumura<sup>1</sup> (1. Meijo Univ. (Japan))

Keywords : Thai traditional medicine、Sensory experience、Materiality of illness

This study focuses on the religious healing practices of traditional medical specialists in Thailand, examining how sensory experience and material imagination intertwine to produce both bodily affliction and recovery in relation to the concept of poison, called *phit*. In contemporary Northeastern Thailand, where the majority of the population consists of Buddhist Lao people, access to biomedical facilities such as hospitals and clinics is no longer particularly difficult. Nonetheless, a wide range of traditional medical practices, including those involving supernatural elements, continue to be accepted and actively practiced. Alongside officially recognized specialists in herbal medicine and therapeutic massage, ritual healers who wield magical powers—often referred to as *mo pao*—also play an important role. These practitioners treat illnesses believed to stem from intrusive external agents, such as malevolent spirits or black magic. Specialists of Buddhism or Brahmanism perform religious rituals to address these issues. This study specifically investigates the notion of poison (*phit*), an intrusive substance perceived by Lao people as a cause of physical disorder, and its treatment by *mo pao* specialists. *Phit* may enter the body unnoticed through wounds or be injected via snakebite. In response, *mo pao* perform ritual healing rituals that involve chanting incantations and blowing breath onto the affected area to expel the poison. Patients not only perceive the presence of poison in their bodies through sensory experience, but also report feeling its removal during the healing process. Through the tangible intersection of their bodies, the perceived poison, and the healer's breath, individuals undergo both illness and recovery. By elucidating the shared process through which the material and immaterial are sensorially recognized and socially validated, this study reveals the distinctive mechanisms at work in religious healing practices.