Zhongyi (Traditional Chinese Medicine) Psychology, *Zhongyi* Cosmetology, and Heart (*Xin*) - Cultivation in China

by

Wei Cong

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Declaration of Committee

Name:	**Wei Cong**
Degree:	**Master of Arts**
Title:	***Zhongyi* (Traditional Chinese Medicine) Psychology, *Zhongyi* Cosmetology, and Heart (*Xin*) - Cultivation in China**
Committee:	**Chair: Prof-Collins Ifeonu** Assistant Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
	Jie Yang Supervisor Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
	Cindy Patton Committee Member Professor Emeritus, Sociology and Anthropology
	Janice Matsumura Examiner Professor, History

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Abstract

This thesis critically explores how *zhongyi* (Traditional Chinese Medicine) practitioners apply "*zhongyi* psychology"—a new sub-discipline using traditional Chinese medical theories to treat physical and mental health issues—to address widespread appearance anxiety and increasing demand for beautification, especially among young urban women in China. More specifically, *zhongyi* practitioners use ideas and practices from *Huangdi Neijing*, one of the earliest Chinese medical classics, to balance patients' hearts/*xin*—the ground of cognition, emotion, virtue, and bodily sensation— and challenge the dominant beauty ideals that favour fair skin, slimness, and youthfulness in China today. Based on six months of ethnographic research with 20 *zhongyi* practitioners in the city of Shenyang, Northeast China, I demonstrate that *zhongyi* psychology's *xin*-centered mode of care enables practitioners to perform holistic labour or *xin*-centered affective and aesthetic labour. They consider their patient's social and personal contexts to identify the underlying reasons for appearance anxiety, and offer personalized treatments. My research shows that the *xin*-centered approach to care alleviates patients' appearance anxiety by promoting appreciation for diverse beauty ideals and fostering their self-acceptance and self-esteem.

Keywords: holistic labour; *zhongyi* (traditional Chinese medicine); heart (*xin*)-cultivation; *zhongyi* psychology; gender; China

Dedication

To my family, whose endless support and unconditional, infinite love sustain me.

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Glossary

Meinu jingji 美女经济	It refers to the "beauty economy," which represents the linkage of everything from social advertisements about cosmetics, plastic surgery, and beauty and healthcare services to economic practices related to female beauty, youthfulness, and sexuality.
Neizai mei 内在美	It roughly means "inner beauty." *Neizai mei* emphasizes that beauty is rooted in a person's character, morals, and values rather than simply their outward appearance.
Qingzhi bing 情志病	It is a *zhongyi* term and roughly means "emotion-related disorders."
Qingzhi neishang 情志内伤	It examines the negative impacts of excessive, uncontrollable affects on internal organs.
Qiyun mei 气韵美	It is a *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideal and roughly means "the beauty of vitality." *Qiyun mei* symbolizes a healthy state achieved through a regular *qi* flow.
Sancai zhengti 三才整体	This theory emphasizes the harmonious relationship that people establish with their natural and social environments.
Shen 神	*Shen* refers to all kinds of mental activities, such as spirit, mind, soul, cognition, affect, and consciousness. *Shen* governs and sustains the life activities of the body (*xing*).
Shenyun mei 神韵美	It is a *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideal and roughly means "the beauty of spiritual charm." *Shenyun mei* emphasizes the importance of cultivating one's inner self and focuses on the moral integrity of *xin*. It values elegance, charisma, and inner grace.
Sunmeixing jibing 损美性疾病	This *zhongyi* term roughly means "beauty-damaging disease." It describes symptoms that may not significantly impact the body (*xing*) pathologically, such as facial chloasma, edema, acne, and tear troughs. However, these symptoms are related to personal social image and beauty. Hence, they can potentially influence people's mental health.
Wuzang shenzhi 五臟神志	*Huangdi Neijing* assigns each organ with a unique affect or emotion: "The heart is joy, the liver is anger, the spleen is thinking, the lung is anxiety, the kidney is fear (心在志为喜, 肝在志为怒, 脾在志为思, 肺在志为忧, 肾在志为恐)".
Xinzhi suozhi 心之所之	It means that the results emanate from the view of *xin*. *Xinzhi suozhi* highlights the importance of *xin's* will (*zhi*) in directing the trajectory of the outcome.

Xin 心	*Xin* roughly means the “heart.” In the *Huangdi Neijing*, *xin* controls how people perceive and respond to external stimuli. It is considered the seat of consciousness and an organ in the chest.
Xing 形	*Xing* roughly means the “body”. It refers to tangible organs, such as meridians, tissues, sensory organs, limbs, and other visible and palpable body parts.
Xingshen yiti 形神一体	It roughly means “body-mind monism.” *Xingshen yiti* describes a highly harmonious balance between the tangible body (*xing*), the mental activities (*shen*), and the heart (*xin*).
Xingtai 形态	It roughly means “bodily performance.” *Xingtai* refers to the diversity of physical appearances.
Xinshen renzhi 心神认知	This theory examines how *xin*’s affective and cognitive judgments about the surrounding environment arise from sensory experiences.
Xin zhu shenming 心主神明	This theory highlights *xin* as the mindful centre responsible for all the mental processes and activities, such as thinking, feeling, imagining, and memorizing.
Xin zhu xuemai 心主血脉	This theory highlights *xin*’s role in regulating the flow of blood and connecting all organs as a whole system through the meridians.
Xintai 心态	*Xintai* is translated as “heart attitude.” It underscores the decisive role of *xin* in determining how an individual views life, relationships, or specific situations.
Yiqing shengqing 以情胜情	*Yiqing shengqing* refers to using a specific affect to harmonize another prevailing affect. It operates on the principle that “sadness overcomes anger, anger overcomes contemplation, contemplation overcomes fear, fear overcomes joy, and joy overcomes sadness (悲胜怒，怒胜思，思胜恐，恐胜喜，喜胜悲)”.
Zhixing mei 知性美	*Zhixing mei*, roughly translated as “intellectual beauty,” underscores the attractiveness of intelligence, wisdom, and depth of thinking.
Zhongyi 中医	It is known as Traditional Chinese Medicine
Zhongyi cosmetology 中医美容术	*Zhongyi* cosmetology refers to the use of various traditional *zhongyi* practices, including acupuncture, moxibustion, scraping therapy, massage, cupping, and herbal medicine, for skin care and beautification. These practices supposedly not only improve one’s appearance; they also promote the idea that external beauty is closely linked to one’s inner heart (*xin*) balance.

Zhongyi psychology 中医心理学	*Zhongyi* psychology utilizes traditional Chinese medical theories to explain, investigate, and treat mental health issues in China.
Ziran 自然	*Ziran* emphasizes the states of self-going, being free, spontaneous, and natural, which suggest that no external forces are applied to manipulate the natural trajectory of things.
Ziran mei 自然美	*Ziran mei* roughly means “natural beauty.” It appreciates the inherent naturalness and originality of things. *Ziran mei* emphasizes being natural without artificial embellishments (天然去雕饰). It valorizes primitiveness, originality, and naturalness while criticizing fabricated, artificial beauty.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. The *xin* (心)/"heart", mental health, and the beauty economy in China

In January 2023, at the office of a *zhongyi* "district hospital"/*qushu yiyuan*(区属医院) in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, I visited Dr. Lee, a well-known female practitioner of *zhongyi* beautification practices or cosmetology. *Zhongyi* cosmetology refers to the use of various traditional *zhongyi* practices, including acupuncture, moxibustion, scraping therapy, massage, cupping, and herbal medicine— for skin care and beautification. These practices supposedly not only improve one's appearance; they also promote the idea that external beauty is closely linked to one's inner heart (*xin*) balance. During my visit, Lee was treating one of her female patients, Zhang's facial chloasma, a condition categorized as a "beauty-damaging disease"/*sunmeixing jibing* (损美性疾病). This term describes conditions like chloasma, edema, acne, and tear troughs that do not usually negatively impact one's overall physical health but may affect one's appearance and self-esteem. Beauty-damaging diseases affect one's social image and mental health. Dr. Lee described Zhang as a patient who was anxious, stressed, and worried. From the perspective of a *zhongyi* practitioner, Lee offered her insights into the etiology of Zhang's chloasma,

> Zhang's chloasma reflects her "heart" issues because she is upset all the time. During her treatment sessions, she told me that she had been married to her husband for almost twenty years, and they had raised a child together. However, none of this has stopped her husband from cheating on her. His unfaithful behaviour has caused her to doubt herself in multiple aspects, especially her femininity, leading her to seek *zhongyi* beautification practices. Her "heart" distress affects the normal functioning of her liver. This further causes *qi* stagnation and contributes to the formation of blood stasis (肝郁气滞, 气滞血瘀). The "heart" also supplies blood to the head, which is the convergence of all *yang* and hundreds of blood vessels (头为诸阳之会, 诸阳所会, 百脉相通). The "heart" further transmits the liver's *qi* stagnation and blood stasis to the head through the body's internal circulation. Zhang's *qi* stagnation and blood stasis create an endocrine imbalance, eventually manifesting on her face as chloasma.

Dr. Lee's explanation highlights the pivotal role of *xin* in connecting mental functions/activities and bodily symptoms. Dr. Lee's narrative also illustrates how Zhang's

family background and marital issues affect her sense of self-worth and her psychological well-being. Zhang's desire for beautification stemmed from the discovery of her husband's extramarital affairs, which led to her questioning her femininity. She now aims to appear younger and have fairer skin by reducing her facial chloasma. Dr. Lee further explained,

> Young female patients aspire to have lightened, flawless skin and a slim body, while middle-aged patients like Zhang have additional requests to appear youthful. The rest of Zhang's beautification requests align with theirs.

In her research on beauty ideals and the beauty economy in China, Jie Yang (2011) argued that the public discourse in China often categorizes women into two types: "tender women"/*nennu* (嫩女) and "ripe women"/*shunu* (熟女). Zhang's beautification request shows her expectation of being recategorized as *nennu* rather than *shunu*. Fair skin, youthfulness, and slimness, which mimic Anglo-European beauty norms, are attributed to *nennu* (Xu and Feiner, 2007; Yang, 2011; Hua, 2013; Wu et al., 2023). Meanwhile, advertisements for cosmetics and beautification services highlight that any deviations from *nennu* "need to be watched over and mortified for aesthetic ends" (Yang, 2011, p. 349). These advertisements promote Euro-American biomedical beautification practices as effective solutions for these deviations (Luo, 2012; Luo, 2013). Although Western biomedical practices fulfill women's desires for the beautification of their bodies, they fail to address the psychological issues that lead to their anxiety and distress about their appearance—that is, the balance of their hearts or *xin* (心) facing social stimuli. An imbalanced *xin* makes people easily susceptible to external social influences, compelling their preoccupation with unattainable beauty ideals and driving them to actively seek beautification practices.

In the Chinese context, *xin* is fundamental in the formation of subjectivities and guides individuals in navigating their social environments (Sundararajan, 2015; Yang, 2015). Chinese culture has placed a greater emphasis on *xin* than on the brain. *Xin* has been widely viewed as the centre for a myriad of cognitive and emotional activities (Sun, 1991). *Xin* presumes an intimate connection between affect and cognition (Sundararajan, 2015, p. 18). In her research on therapeutic governance in China, Jie Yang (2015) defined *xin* as "the origin of all emotions and the grounding space for all aspects of bodily and social well-being" (p. 12). Hence, *xin* can be considered "a relational perspective with a seat of cognition, virtue, and bodily sensation instead of a

being" (Yang, 2015, p. 12). As my supervisor, Professor Jie Yang elaborated on her research on *xin*, she provided me with a new perspective for analyzing current mental and physical health concerns related to the obsession with younger looks or becoming *nennu* among young urban women in China. Since *xin* is a keyword recurring in my ethnographic research with *zhongyi* practitioners, she suggested that I discuss *zhongyi* beautification practices with a focus on the concept of *xin* from the perspective of *zhongyi* psychology. This perspective incorporates the global movement of indigenous psychology, which draws on local, communal and indigenous healing resources for mental distress as a way to challenge the universal values and principles associated with Euro-American psychology.

Engaging *zhongyi* psychology and traditional Chinese beautification practices, I aim to answer the following three research questions, which connect *zhongyi* psychology and *zhongyi* cosmetology with the increasing demand for beautification among young urban women:

1. How do *zhongyi* practitioners apply *zhongyi* psychology techniques to their beautification practices to assist their patients in navigating external social stressors influencing their hearts (*xin*) and bodies (*xing*)?

2. How do *zhongyi* practitioners view the increasing demand for beautification practices, and what suggestions, practices, and therapies can they offer to meet this demand?

3. How does the beauty ideal promoted by *zhongyi* cosmetology challenge the current valorization of fair skin, youthfulness, and slimness embodied by *nennu*?

In this thesis, I investigate the significance of *xin* in Chinese cosmetological practices and explore how *zhongyi* practitioners employ *xin*-centered *zhongyi* psychology techniques in their beautification practices. This approach aims to enhance their patients' *xin*-balance and transform their responses to the social pressure of conforming to beauty standards associated with becoming *nennu*. In the following section, I briefly explain the increasing demand for beautification practices among young urban women in China.

1.2. The increasing demand for beautification practices in China

For young women in Chinese cities, beautification addresses not essential medical needs but social and psychological needs. One reason might be lookism (Lee et al., 2017; Niu et al., 2021). Lookism refers to the "preferential treatment of those considered to be attractive and discrimination against those deemed less physically desirable" in employment or other aspects of social life (Niu et al., 2021, p. 83). It has negative impacts on women's mental and physical health, leading to problems like negative self-evaluation, appearance anxiety, eating disorders, body shame and dissatisfaction, and body dysmorphia (Yang, 2011; Sanders, 2017; Elias and Gill, 2018; Chen et al., 2024). Furthermore, in China, young urban women who view being good-looking as a form of capital, beauty as a currency, or an embodied distinction are more likely to beautify themselves in order to achieve *nennu*/"tender women" (Hua, 2013; Wang et al., 2021; Rodríguez and Louise, 2022; Hoffmann and Warschburger, 2019). These women desire to achieve the main putative characteristics of *nennu*: fair skin, youthfulness, and slimness.

In her research on gender and China's beauty economy, Jie Yang (2011) argued that political and economic factors contribute to the gender ideology and current idealization of *nennu* in China. After the 1978 Chinese economic reform, China has started advocating a market economy, leading to the rise of consumerist culture. Advertisements within China's consumerist culture associate beautification practices with *nennu* and construct beauty as a purchasable commodity. Yang (2011) used the term "beauty economy"/*meinu jingji* (美女经济) to describe the linkage between everything from advertisements about cosmetics, plastic surgery, beauty, and health care services related to female beauty, youthfulness, and sexuality to economic practice. *Meinu jingji* objectifies women and portrays them as ideal consumer subjects. Pursuing beautification practices thus enables women to occupy a space within this consumerist culture, and women learn to formulate their identities through their physically made-over selves (Yang, 2011). As a result, physical qualities like youthfulness, fair skin, and slimness have acquired "new importance as tokens of class and status distinctions" (Yang, 2011, p. 336). Achieving these qualities through beautification practices indicates a transformation in social class. Hence, beautification practices are glorified as

“weapons” that allow women to gain independence, beauty, and power (Xu and Tan, 2020; Yang, 2011). The connection established between beauty and self-empowerment boosts young urban women’s motivation to engage in beautification practices. However, the message underlying this connection is that only women who meet the standards of *nennu* can be empowered. Social advertisements about beautification practices thus advocate that conforming to *nennu* is an ideal pathway through which women can gain self-esteem and confidence.

In his research on psychological factors influencing young urban women’s decisions to undergo beautification practices, Guan (2021) identifies the continuous occurrence of several negative affects as the underlying cause. These include the frustration of experiencing lookism, depression resulting from failing to meet the ideals for *nennu*, anxiety stemming from constant body surveillance, and fear of losing the beauty advantage in social competitions (Guan, 2021). Beauty apps, such as MeituPic (美图秀秀), Makeup Plus (美妆相机), and Xin Yang (新氧), raise awareness of appearance among young urban women and strengthen their acceptance of *nennu* as the beauty ideal (Lyu et al., 2022). Beauty apps achieve this in several ways: first, their filters display desirable traits of *nennu* and enable users to modify themselves accordingly. Second, the beautified results of these apps prompt young urban women to strive for *nennu*’s bodily traits through various beautification practices. Beauty apps invite people to engage in self-monitoring, incite them to ever greater punitive self-surveillance, and involve them in intense metricized self-scrutiny (Sanders, 2017; Elias and Gill, 2018). Thus, beauty apps have become a firmly established part of “the beauty-industrial complex”, with horizontal links to cosmetics companies, the aesthetic surgery industry, and the fashion industry (Sanders, 2017, p. 66). The next section discusses the Chinese beauty market and the shift of beauty ideals from artificial beauty to natural beauty.

1.2.1. The development of *zhongyi* cosmetology (中医美容)

In 2004, the rising popularity of the term “artificial beauty”/*renzao meinu* (人造美女) in social media reflected an unprecedented growth in the cosmetic surgery industry in China. It also indicated an increasing preference for Euro-American biomedical beautification over traditional methods in the Chinese beauty market during that time

(Hua, 2013; Luo, 2012). Here, the term “artificial”/*renzao* (人造) emphasizes the visibility of post-surgery results, signifying conspicuous consumption that symbolizes one's social class and financial superiority. It also implies “a complete rejection of the indigenous Chinese aesthetics” (Xu and Feiner, 2007, p. 318). This preference for Anglo-European aesthetics has contributed to the internalization of the logic of imitation and the fortification of Occidentalism, which suggests that “the West is better than the rest” (Xu and Feiner, 2007, p. 317). This preference has also gradually placed Euro-American biomedical beautification practices in a dominant position over *zhongyi* beautification practices in the Chinese beauty industry since 2004. However, with the state-sponsored revitalization of traditional Chinese culture in recent years, public interest in the cultural and economic value of *zhongyi* is continuously increasing, and *zhongyi* cosmetology is attracting more and more attention in the beauty industry (Fang et al., 2023).

The Chinese government has implemented several initiatives to fortify the development of *zhongyi*. In 2017, for instance, the president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, proposed "Confidence in Culture"/*wenhua zixin* (文化自信) to draw the public’s attention to China’s historical and cultural heritage (Chinese Government, 2017). In 2019, the National Medical Products Administration (国家药品监督管理局) issued an initiative named “Suggestions on promoting the inheritance, innovation, and development of *zhongyi* (关于促进中医药传承创新发展的意见)” (Xinhua She, 2019). Following this report, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (国家中医药管理局) proposed another initiative, "Strengthening confidence in culture and promoting the modernization of *zhongyi* (坚定文化自信, 推动中医药现代化)" in 2023 (Zhang, 2023). These initiatives have increased the public’s awareness of *zhongyi* and highlighted its potential as a beautification practice (Fang et al., 2023).

In addition, in China, young urban women prefer beautification practices that preserve their individual characteristics and enhance their overall looks (Samizadeh and Wu, 2018). Young urban women do not want to alter their entire facial structure or skeletal aesthetics since they believe that this would transform them into someone else and shift their identities. The “artificial beauty”/*renzao meinu* (人造美女) standard for beautification practices in 2014 has thus gradually shifted to the current one, which highlights authenticity and individuality. Feng (2020) cited Zhuang Zi in this context, using “natural beauty” or *ziran mei* (自然美) to describe current standards for

beautification practices. *Ziran mei* combines *ziran* (自然), meaning nature, and *mei* (美), meaning beauty, to form an appreciation of the aesthetics of natural landscapes and their primitiveness. Liu (2022) argued that *zi* (自) from *ziran* has "a literal meaning of self" and another word, *ran* (然) depicts "a dynamic, generative, and spontaneous state" (p. 285). *Ziran* emphasizes the states of self-going, being free, spontaneous, and natural, which suggest that no external forces are applied to manipulate the natural trajectory of things (Liu, 2022). According to Liu's interpretation of *ziran*, this term emphasizes the primal nature of things and their presence without any disturbances or interruptions (Liu, 2022). Hence, the beauty standard of *ziran mei* emphasizes "being natural and not having artificial embellishments"/*tianran qu diaoshi* (天然去雕饰). *Ziran mei* valorizes primitiveness, originality, and naturality and criticizes fabricated, artificial beauty (Feng, 2020).

Following *ziran mei*, *zhongyi* cosmetology extracts natural resources and adopts non-invasive methods. Fang et al. (2023) argued that *zhongyi* beautification practices work beyond the level of enhancing one's appearance, as they address both mental and physical health. That is, *zhongyi* beautification practices largely rely on the utilization of natural resources to promote internal organ functioning, accelerate metabolism, promote self-healing, and address different forms of *qi* and blood *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation". *Zhongyi* cosmetology prioritizes health and an overall balance between the person and their environment. Since psychological factors, to some extent, drive young urban women to engage in beautification practices, *zhongyi* practitioners also apply *zhongyi* psychology during their treatment sessions. The following section introduces the history and development of *zhongyi* psychology and its main theories.

1.2.2. The history and development of *zhongyi* psychology (中医心理学)

Zhongyi psychology utilizes traditional Chinese medical theories to explain, investigate, and treat mental health issues in China (Zhongyi Medicine, 2019). The historical origin of *zhongyi* psychology can be traced back two thousand years to the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon or *Huangdi Neijing* (黄帝内经). It is considered as one of the earliest medical classics in China. It is composed of two main parts: *Suwen* (素问) and *Lingshu* (灵枢). *Suwen* consists of dialogues between the Yellow Emperor

(*Huangdi*) and his ministers, particularly Qi Bo. Their dialogues form the theoretical foundation for *zhongyi* psychology. *Lingshu* delves into practical aspects and discusses treatments such as acupuncture, moxibustion, scraping therapy, massage, and cupping. *Huangdi Neijing* thus provided *zhongyi* psychology with a comprehensive system of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention methods. However, despite its deep historical roots, *zhongyi* psychology was not recognized as a distinct discipline for dedicated research until the late 20th century.

Before the 1980s, Western psychology first arrived in China and dominated the field of mental health (Yang, 2015). Then, the Cultural Revolution that occurred from 1966 to 1976 involved viewing psychology as a “spiritual opiate” that numbs the masses, allowing them to be exploited (Yang, 2015). This significantly delayed the emergence of *zhongyi* psychology as a formal discipline. Until the 1980s, “political changes and economic reform had yielded a more favourable environment” for the practice, which gave psychology the opportunity to re-emerge as a legitimate discipline (Yang, 2015, p. 14). Amid this political-economic shift, *zhongyi* psychology became formally recognized as a discipline and gained public visibility. In 1980, Wang Miqu, Chen Zhonggeng, and their fellow researchers formally proposed the concept of *zhongyi* psychology (Dong, 2007; Chen, 2018). Since then, research on *zhongyi* psychology has gradually become more active, with Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (成都中医药大学) formally establishing a *zhongyi* psychology research group in 1982. Then, in 1985, an inaugural academic conference on this discipline was held in Chengdu. In 1992, the Professional Committee of *zhongyi* psychology was established in China to endorse its national development and fortify its international influence.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, *zhongyi* psychology became more widely recognized and accepted in social and professional fields (Yang, 2003). After the international conference held by the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (WFCMS) in June 2006 in Beijing, *zhongyi* psychology gradually started drawing international attention (Dong, 2007). The psycho-boom that took place in 2008—"a year informally known as the first year (元年) of psychotherapy in China”—drew public attention to the use of psychological terms to explain and investigate various healthcare-related issues and increasing interest in psychological training/practices (Yang, 2015; Huang, 2017). Following this growth in psychological trends, the National Administration

of Traditional Chinese Medicine (国家中医药管理局) approved the institution of *zhongyi* psychology as a key discipline in 2009 (Wang and Yang, 2013, p. 7).

However, under the dominance of Western psychology, the full acceptance or integration of *zhongyi* psychology into mainstream mental health practices has remained elusive, with it being suspended between the professional, folk, and popular sectors (Yang, 2023). The applicatory scope of *zhongyi* psychology also appears limited compared to the extensive progress observed in Western psychology (Tao, 2021). Additionally, under the massive influence of its Western counterpart, *zhongyi* psychology begins to incorporate the dualistic view of the body-mind relationship prevalent in Western psychology research. This diverges from the body-mind monism central to *zhongyi* philosophy (Tao, 2021). Consequently, Yang (2023) pointed out that the struggle for *zhongyi* psychology to acquire equal professional status and social authority is ongoing.

Directly utilizing Western knowledge to explain Chinese mental health issues inevitably reinforces Western authority and limits the development of indigenous psychology. Watters (2010) argues that the globalization of Western psychology ignores cultural differences in interpreting, diagnosing, and treating mental health issues among non-Western countries. It ultimately sustains power imbalances and adheres to Western standards of normality. Hence, it is important to develop *zhongyi* psychology to better address mental health issues in China rather than directly applying Western psychology. For one thing, the promotion of *zhongyi* psychology aligns with the current ontological turn in Anthropology. The ontological turn questions established categories and definitions by exploring alternative explanations of various cultural groups (Heywood, 2017). Promoting *zhongyi* psychology also aligns with the current attention that the Chinese government gives to mental health issues. In their policy report about the improvement of psychological health services, the Chinese government stated that the current state of mental health services falls far short of meeting the needs of the general population and economic development (Chinese Government, 2017). This report aimed to increase public awareness of mental health issues, enhance the training of psychologists and psychiatrists, and improve the population's overall physical and mental health.

Currently, the official media of the Chinese government, People's Daily Online (2024), argues that the therapeutic methods of *zhongyi* psychology are more suitable than Western psychology for the reserved nature and unique characteristics of Chinese individuals. Using indigenous psychology is thus a better strategy to diminish the current prevalence of psychological issues among different Chinese people groups. Hence, People's Daily Online (2024) points out that there is an urgent need to strengthen the inheritance and promotion of *zhongyi* psychology. In addition, Western psychological concepts should be used as auxiliary and supplementary tools. Official assistance in promoting *zhongyi* psychology will expand its overall influence and combat the dominance of Western knowledge in this discipline. The next section introduces the key theories of *zhongyi* psychology and its *xin*-centered mode of care.

1.2.3. *Xin*-centered mode of care in *zhongyi* psychology from *Huangdi Neijing*

The origin in *Huangdi Neijing* of *zhongyi* psychology makes it an indispensable therapy for addressing mental health issues in China. Contrary to the Western dualistic view of the body-mind relationship, which emphasizes human consciousness as an immaterial entity distinct from the physical body, *Huangdi Neijing* adopts a holistic view to examine the body-mind relationship. It promotes *xingshen yiti* (形神一体), roughly translated to "body-mind monism", to describe the mutually affected relationship between the body and mind. Contextualizing "body" and "mind" in *zhongyi* terms, the "body" roughly corresponds to *xing* (形), while the "mind" roughly refers to *shen* (神). According to *Huangdi Neijing*, *xing* refers to tangible organs, such as meridians, tissues, sensory organs, limbs, and other visible and palpable body parts. *Shen* refers to intangible body parts and activities, such as the spirit, mind, soul, cognition, affects, and consciousness. *Huangdi Neijing* claims that "shen governs the activities of *xing* (*shen neng yu qixing* 神能御其形)", and "when *xing* takes form, *shen* is born (*xingju er shensheng* 形具而神生)".

Liu Wansu, a famous *zhongyi* practitioner from the Jin Dynasty (1115—1234), elaborated on *Huangdi Neijing*'s *shen-xing* relationship and proposed that a malfunction in *shen* affects *xing*'s health, and vice versa. He further indicated that *xingshenyiti* (形神一体)/"body-mind monism" is a state achieved through a highly harmonious balance

between the tangible form, *xing*, and the mental-psychological state, *shen*. *Xing* provides *shen* with essential nutrients to sustain intangible mental activities, and *shen* remains in a calm state to nourish *xing*, thereby ensuring proper organ functioning. Hence, *xingshenyiti* highlights *shen-xing* balance as the prerequisite for mental and physical health.

Huangdi Neijing suggests that *xin* (心), roughly the "heart", governs the reciprocal *shen-xing* interaction. *Xin* has a spiritual dimension and "it serves as the monarch, from whom *shen* resides and comes out (心为君主之官，神明出焉)." This spiritual dimension governs the mental activities of *shen* (心者, 神明之主也). *Xin* also manifests as a physical organ, the "heart", that "governs the functioning of the five viscera and six bowels (心者，五脏六腑之大主也)." This physical dimension enables *xin* to be "the lord of *xing* (心者，形之君也)." In Raphals' (2021) analysis of *xin* in *Huangdi Neijing*, she concluded that *xin* is "the seat of consciousness and thought" as well as "an organ in the chest" (p. 21). *Huangdi Neijing* states *xin*'s direct impact on mental activities as *xin zhu shenming* (心主神明) and its influences on physiological activities as *xin zhu xuemai* (心主血脉). According to Yang's (2023) interpretation of the two terms, *xin zhu shenming* highlights *xin* as the mindful centre responsible for all the mental processes and activities, such as thinking, feeling, imagining, and memorizing. Yang's (2023) interpretation of *xin zhu xuemai* shows that *xin*, being the tangible bodily visceral or organ system, regulates the flow of blood and connects all organs as a whole system through meridians. Thus, *xin* is the locus of *shen-xing* interaction and treating *xin* has a direct impact on both mental and physiological aspects.

This understanding of *xin*, from spiritual and physiological dimensions, forms *zhongyi* psychology as *xin*-centered mode of care. *Huangdi Neijing* proposes that people's surrounding social and natural environments have a direct impact on their *xin*. It states that "human comes to life through the *qi* of "heaven"/*tian* (天), and "earth"/*di* (地) (人禀天地之气生)" and "when diagnosing the disease, the practitioner should inquire about the diet, housing, and other life conditions (凡欲诊病者，必问饮食居处)." Based on his interpretation of *Huangdi Neijing*, Professor Wang Keqin from the Heilongjiang Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine (黑龙江中医研究院) proposed the theory of *sancai zhengti* (三才整体). This theory is roughly translated as "the harmonious

relationship between *tian* (天)/“heaven”, *di* (地)/“earth”, and *ren* (人)/“human”. The concepts, *tian* and *di,* refer to the natural and spiritual elements, while *ren* refers to the social environment. *Sancai zhengti* plays a crucial role in *zhongyi* psychology as it highlights the interrelatedness and mutual influences of natural and social factors on human mental and physical health. *Huangdi Neijing* uses *qingzhi* (情志), roughly translated as “affect and will”, to describe how a person feels and views their surrounding environments.

Qing (情)/ “affect” from *qingzhi* emphasizes affective experiences, while *zhi* (志)/“will” accentuates cognitive ideas. Since *xin* assumes an intimate connection between affect and cognition in Chinese culture (Sundararajan, 2015), it also regulates *qingzhi*. *Huangdi Neijing* assigns each organ with a unique *qingzhi*, “the heart is joy, the liver is anger, the spleen is thinking, the lung is anxiety, the kidney is fear (心在志为喜, 肝在志为怒, 脾在志为思, 肺在志为忧, 肾在志为恐).” Since *xin* is the monarch among all the organs (心为君主之官 *xin wei junzhuzhiguan*), it governs the affects and wills of the lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys. This affective and cognitive regulatory role of *xin* over the other four organs is termed *xinshen ganzhi* (心神感知) and *wuzhang qingzhi* (五脏情志). Based on his interpretation of these two concepts in *Huangdi Neijing*, Professor Wang Keqin further proposed another theory, *xinshen renzhi* (心神认知), which focuses on how *xin*’s affective and cognitive judgments about its surrounding environment arise from sensory experiences.

According to *Huangdi Neijing*, five sensory perceptions (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching) connect with the inner five organs. “The nose connects to the lungs (鼻者, 肺之官也).” “The eyes connect to the liver (目者, 肝之官也).” “The mouth and lips connect to the spleen (口唇者, 脾之官也).” “The tongue connects to the heart (舌者, 心之官也).” “The ears connect to the kidneys (耳者, 腎之官也).” These senses form the foundation for *xin* to accurately comprehend external stimuli. In his interpretation of *Huangdi Neijing*, Professor Wang proposes that “the kidneys’ *qi* penetrates the ears (肾气通耳)” and *xin* regulates the kidneys’ functions, so *xin* also connects with the auditory function of the ears and further makes judgments based on what is heard. This also applies to the other sensory perceptions, such as seeing and smelling. *Xin* gains a direct connection with the two senses by governing their

corresponding internal organs, the liver and lungs. “The *qi* of *xin* connects with the tongue (心气通于舌),” and “the harmony of *xin* allows the tongue to savour the five flavours (心和则舌能知五味矣).” Hence, the five senses are the medium through which *xin* perceives the external environment.

The word, *qi* (气), mentioned above, refers to the life-giving energy that circulates through the organ systems and meridians of *xing* to sustain life activities and preserve health. The statement, “anger bewilders *qi*, euphoria disperses *qi*, sadness consumes *qi*, fear confuses *qi*, and thought obstructs *qi* (怒则气上，喜则气缓，悲则气消，恐则气下，思则气结),” from *Huangdi Neijing*, indicates that variations in affects occur synchronously with changes in *qi* flow. Hence, *qi* has both physiological and spiritual dimensions to connect *xing* and *xin*. In Dong’s (2007) analysis of *qingzhi* and *qi*, she proposes that a moderated expression of *qingzhi* can regulate *qi* flow as both joy and anger, when expressed at a moderate degree, smooth the flow of *qi*. Joy smoothing *qi* flow is named *xi tiao da* (喜条达) and anger smoothing *qi* flow is termed *xie tiao da* (泄条达). *Huangdi Neijing* uses *qingzhi neishang* (情志内伤) to discuss the negative impacts of excessive, uncontrollable affects on internal organs and categorizes it as a type of *qingzhi bing* (情志病). Based on her understanding of *Huangdi Neijing*, Zhang (2007) translated *qingzhi bing* as “emotion-related disorders” (p. 1). Zhang’s (2007) discussions of *qingzhi bing* indicate its two etiologies: one is named *yin bing er yu* (因病而郁), which examines stagnations originating from physiological disorders, and the other is called *yin yu er bing* (因郁而病), which examines illness due to stagnation of affects. Zhang (2007) emphasized the treatment of *xin* in *yin yu er bing* by engaging a Ming Dynasty *zhongyi* practitioner, Miu Xiyong’s explanations. They argue that even if the herbal remedy could help unblock the stagnant *qi* and activate the circulation of the blood, the problem would relapse if the illness of *xin* persisted (Zhang, 2007, p. 89). Scheid (2013) also argued that the depression of *xin* is the key factor contributing to the malfunctioning of internal organs. Hence, to cure an illness, *xin* must be healed first (Yang, 2023).

1.3. Theoretical framework: *Xin* and Heart-centered Affective and Holistic Labor

My theoretical framework draws on theories on affect and affective labour, but my focus is on their applicability in the Chinese context and on the role of *xin*/heart-centered holistic labour in beautification practices. My theoretical framework is mostly inspired by Jie Yang's analysis of *xin* in her multiple studies on (indigenous) psychology and alternative mental health care in China, as well as her research on China's beauty economy — the aesthetic and holistic labour of beauty care workers. While theories related to affects or emotions form the foundation of my theoretical framework, they only partially explain the *qing* (情)/"affect" part of *qingzhi* in *Huangdi Neijing*. For the *zhi* (志)/"will" part of *qingzhi*, I primarily adopt Yang's perspective on the psychomoral and therapeutic dimension of *xin* or "heart" as the most fundamental component of being and lifeways in China (and Japan) and as the way for people to experience culture in both countries. *Zhongyi* psychology prioritizes the treatment of *xin*-related distress, aiming to achieve *xin-shen-xing (heart-body — form/constitution)* balance as a way to alleviate mental distress.

I also draw on Michael Hardt's concept of affective labour, which generates immaterial products such as a sense of relaxation and connection, in order to bridge my analysis of the role of *zhongyi* practitioners, which is nevertheless more than affective labour. That is, *zhongyi* practitioners engaged heart-centered holistic labour as the heart is the ground of cognition, emotion/affect, virtue and bodily sensation (see also Yang 2017). The discussions in *Huangdi Neijing* of *qingzhi bing* (malaise in *qingzhi)* highlight *xin'*s inability to control and regulate *qing* based on its *zhi* about external environments, leading to mental and physical health problems. *Qing* can be translated as emotion or affect but diverges from affect as it is heart-centered and based on Chinese holism.

1.3.1. *Qing* (情)/"affect" and *xin* (心)/"heart"

Sara Ahmed (2004) and Sianne Ngai (2005) believe that affect and emotion are interchangeable, arguing that affect highlights bodily reactions to external social stimuli, while emotion is a culturally dependent construct with structured linguistic expressions. Therefore, affect and emotion differ only in intensity. Following the connection between affect and internal organs, I translate *qing* as affect to stress the agency of the body. In

her analysis of affect, Yang (2014) argues that affects offer a particular way of rendering the world intelligible through bodily engagement. Affect can direct people to act in ways that support (or challenge) power, because “affect structures encounters as a series of modifications that can dispose bodies for action in a given way” (Yang, 2014, p. 17). Ahmed (2004) highlighted the influence of social factors in shaping people’s affective experiences. Ngai (2005) believed that affect reflects personal outlooks and symbolic struggles. Both claimed that affect has a social origin, and the sociality of affect allows it to circulate within the population to form collective consciousness and intersubjectivity. Patricia and Halley (2007) claimed that the ability of affect to work on and between bodies illustrates that affect is a productive and contagious force, having the capacity to act and to be acted upon. Hence, these discussions of affect highlight the body’s permeable transcendence and conceptual interlinkage with its surroundings.

In the Chinese context, the boundaries between the body, the family, and the state are more fluid than in the West (Brownell,1995). People in China tend to somatize their mental distress as bodily discomfort due to the stigmatization of psychological illness in traditional cultural values and norms (Zhang, 2007). Somatization indicates a socio-culturally acceptable way for the Chinese to express mental distress. It also allows *zhongyi* practitioners to treat their patient’s mental health issues based on the embodied symptoms on *xing* (形)/“body”. In *Huangdi Neijing, yin yu er bing* (因郁而病)/“illness due to stagnation of *qing*” is similar to somatization as it also describes how mental distress can lead to bodily discomfort. According to Yang (2015), mental distress or psychological issues are often referred to as *xinbing* (心病)/“heartache” or “heart-related distress” in the Chinese context (ibid., p. 12). Indeed, in *Huangdi Neijing*, *xinbing* is believed to affect the etiology of physiological diseases, as the seven types of *qing* connect with physiological organs, and the excessive release of *qing* causes internal organ damage (*qing zhi neishang* 情致内伤). These organs are perceived to be commanded by the *xin*/“heart”, which is considered the ruler of the body and the master of all mental activities. However, the notion of *qing* needs to be discussed in the Chinese context, as the Chinese culture has been characterized as a culture of *xin* (Xu, 1993; Ku, 2018). Hence, alleviating *xinbing* is crucial to recovering from any form of disease.

1.3.2. *Zhi* (志)/"will" and *xin* (心)/"heart"

The "will"/*zhi* (志) part of *qingzhi* is under *xin*'s regulation, since *xin* is "the interface for the consciousness of the entire being" (Yang, 2023). The development of diseases follows a time-bound trajectory, and Zhu Xi, an ancient Chinese philosopher from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), promoted the idea of *xinzhi suozhi* (心之所之), which means that the results emanate from the view of *xin*. *Xinzhi suozhi* highlights the importance of *xin's zhi* in directing the trajectory of the outcome. *Zhi* is psychological persistence in conscious and purposeful actions. According to *Lingshu*, when *zhi* is harmonized with *qing*, keeping *xin* in a balanced state, "the seminal essence and shen can focus and be true (精神专直)," "regrets and anger do not begin (悔怒不起)," "the five viscera do not receive evil (五脏不受邪矣)." *Zhongyi* psychology believes that changing *xin* can influence how people engage with their social worlds and relieve their physical and mental *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation" (Zhou et al., 2020). Since *xin*, as the moral core, regulates and controls the physical impulses triggered by external forces in order to achieve equanimity and peace (see Yang 2017 on *xin's* virtual power), achieving *xin*-balance is the first step to avoiding the arousal of excessive *qing*. Both *qing* and *yu* have spiritual and physiological dimensions. For their spiritual dimensions, they discuss mental activities, such as personal views, affective fluctuations, and psychological distress. For their physiological dimensions, they examine how changes in *qing* lead to inefficient circulation of blood and *qi*, manifested as different kinds of *yu*. In her understanding of *xin*, Raphals (2021) highlights the active role of *xin* in "shaping responses to the world by forming stable intentions that override the influence of external forces and emotional responses to them" (p.72). Hence, her discussion indicates that how *xin* views and thinks about the world is crucial since *xin* has the power to override and manage all kinds of spiritual and physiological changes.

To better understand how these *zhongyi* concepts (*qing*, *zhi*, *yu*, and *xin*) relate to my research on traditional beautification practices, the application of *zhongyi* psychology, and the role of *zhongyi* practitioners, I consider them to offer an alternative explanation of *qing* and *zhi*. I argue that since *xin* governs both spiritual and physiological dimensions, changing how *xin* views external stimuli leads to changes in *qing*, which further alleviates any *qi* and blood stagnation of *xing*. The increasing demand for beautification practices among young urban women illustrates how the

social pressure to achieve *nennu* contributes to their mental *yu*, which can further transform into physiological *yu* categorized as “beauty-damaging diseases”/*sunmeixing jibing* (损美性疾病). Hence, their beautification requests have both social and psychological roots. *Zhongyi* cosmetology emphasizes a holistic understanding of beauty and well-being, highlighting the interplay between the affective and cognitive aspects of *xin* and social expectations of physical appearance. It believes that beauty is the state of equanimity of *xin* in the face of external social pressure. Therefore, *zhongyi* practitioners apply indigenous psychology to harmonize *xin*-imbalance.

1.3.3. Differences between *xin*-centered and Euro-American approaches

This holistic view of *zhongyi* cosmetology differs from the Euro-American biomedical beautification practices, which adopt a reductionist approach by altering appearances without considering the mental-psychological state. Euro-American beautification practices prioritize observable physical outcomes and may not fully address *xinbing* (心病)/“heartache” behind beautification requests. These practices are often evaluated based on post-surgical efficacy rather than the impact on both mental and physical health. In contrast, influenced by *zhongyi* holism, *zhongyi* practitioners believe that *xin*-balance contributes to outer beauty. Therefore, they employ a *xin*-centered approach from *zhongyi* psychology to address patients’ mental and physiological *yu*. This *xin*-centered care applied during *zhongyi* beautification practices aims to strengthen patients’ “hearts”, enabling them to better cope with external pressure.

The interconnectedness of *xin* (心)/“heart”, *xing* (形)/“body”, and the social and natural environment enables *zhongyi* psychology to transcend the limitations of its Euro-American counterpart, which promotes a dichotomic view between body (soma) and mind (psyche). The separation emphasizes quantifiable outcomes reflected in bodily reactions and universal biological principles, rather than culturally specific practices. These factors contribute to the standardization of Euro-American psychological treatment. In contrast, the *xin*-centered approach of *zhongyi* psychology focuses on individualized care, allowing *zhongyi* practitioners to understand the specific context of each person’s experience and address their unique needs. Euro-American psychology’s

standardized treatment prioritizes uniformity over personalized care, overlooking the different manifestations of psychological disorders influenced by cultural factors. For example, a culturally specific illness, neurasthenia (*shenjing shuairuo* 神经衰弱, also "weak nerves"), which many Chinese experience due to the somatization of mental distress, does not reach the level of a psychological disorder by Euro-American standards but still requires psychological intervention (Zhang, 2007). Traditional *zhongyi* practices are effective in addressing *shenjing shuairuo*, illustrating the differences in treatment methods and disease categories between culturally specific conditions and Euro-American psychiatric disorders.

For my research, mental *yu* and beautification practice-seeking behaviours are complicated processes that respond to a complex of personal and social environments and involve negotiating among diversified perspectives between the self and others. To address the current increasing demand for beautification practices, social factors and personal beliefs should be considered along with Chinese culture and *zhongyi*. In Chinese culture, *xin* is considered the root of both physical and mental life, guiding an individual's way of living and attitude. *Xin* embodies the core of a person's being. The holistic care of *zhongyi* beautification practices, integrating *zhongyi* psychology's *xin*-centered approach, ensures that practitioners consider patients' mental and physical health simultaneously and prioritize addressing their mental *yu* or *xinbing*, which negatively influences the health of *xing*.

1.3.4. *Xin*-centered affective or holistic labour

To examine the role of *zhongyi* practitioners in the process of alleviating their patents' *xin bing* and addressing *yu* of *xing*, I consider Michael Hardt's affective labour and Jie Yang's holistic labour, a form of labour that requires the involvement of the "heart" as the moral core and as the ground of cognition, emotion, virtue and bodily sensation. This notion of holistic labour goes beyond what Hardt (1999) calls affective labour, immaterial labour that relies on service, knowledge, or communication. For affective labour, the product of it is "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community" (Hardt 1999, p. 96). It is an immaterial labour that relies on service, knowledge, or communication (Hardt, 1999). Affective labour emphasizes human-involved interaction, which allows the creation and manipulation of affects. Going beyond affective labour, in the Chinese

context, since *qing* or affect connects to *xin*, the so-called affective labour is a form of holistic labour anchored in the *xin*. Indeed, *xin* is not a solitary entity as *xin'*s consciousness is formed in relation to the others (Sun, 1991). *Xin* is organized within a collective matrix of two and the presence of another *xin* completes its full existence (Sun, 1991). This implies a collective thinking mode on which *xin* relies to develop its consciousness and affect. Hence, I adopt affective labour, which produces a sense of connectedness to examine the role of *zhongyi* practitioners in beautification practices.

Yang (2017) puts forward the idea of "holistic labour" as heart-centered care to contextualize affective labour and examines the role played by beauty care workers. Her research demonstrates that services related to China's beauty industry are not only limited to beautification practices alone. Beauty care workers are expected to provide "holistic service"/*quanfangwei fuwu* (全方位服务), encompassing emotional, psychological and moral support. Such expectations make them become "a professional, a mentor, a confidante—even a counsellor" as they need to "identify threats to the health and beauty of clients' bodies that can be reduced through beautification" (Yang, 2017, p. 123). Thus, I also engage Yang's holistic labour to examine how *zhongyi* practitioners identify the mental *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation" contributing to their patients' increasing demand for beautification, as well as how practitioners adopt traditional beautification practices and a *xin*-centered approach to harmonize their patients' physiological and mental *yu*. The next section outlines the methodology that I used to collect data and build my theoretical framework, including the interlocutor recruitment, interview process, ethnographic data collection, and analyses conducted.

1.4. Methodology

To answer my overarching questions, *zhongyi* practitioners who perform traditional beautification practices were my primary interlocutors. My methods included in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty *zhongyi* practitioners (15 of whom were female), casual conversations with some of their patients, and analysis of numerous *zhongyi* classics and relevant research.

My interview guide was divided into three sections. The interview started by examining the therapeutic efficacy of different beautification practices in *zhongyi* cosmetology. I asked the practitioners to explain how they finalized and implemented

practices in relation to the underlying principles. The second part delved into the practitioners' perspectives on *zhongyi* cosmetology and their roles as *zhongyi* practitioners. I aimed to explore the flexibility of *zhongyi* practitioners and study the application of *zhongyi* psychology techniques during the beautification practices. The final section of my interview guide explored how *zhongyi* practitioners view the current Westernized beauty ideal, which results in a massive *xin-shen-xing* imbalance among their patients. I aimed to understand how these practitioners perceive the differences between the Westernized beauty ideals and those idealized by *zhongyi* cosmetology. The three sections of sub-questions pertaining to the overarching questions investigated how *zhongyi* practitioners reconciled the external rising social pressure regarding bodily performance and the internal affective responses of their patients to meet such social expectations. It explored how *zhongyi* practitioners transformed their patients' *xin*, making them more adaptable to broader social environments.

1.4.1. Ethics Approval and Recruitment Process

This research involves human subjects, so I submitted my TCPS Core2 Certificate and the final drafts of all my research materials, such as recruitment letter templates, semi-structured interview questionnaires, and consent forms both in English and Chinese languages, to SFU Research Ethics Broad. Upon approval, the Research Ethics Board highlighted the importance of data security and the anonymity of the research participants, so I stored all research data in the SFU Vault, which is under the protection of the MFA enrollment system, and only the research team had access to the materials. I pseudonymized all participants and anonymized all disclosed personal information during the conversations. I also deleted sensitive information that might reveal personal identities or workplaces for privacy concerns. Hence, no real names or signatures were collected, recorded, or transcribed during the research process, ensuring complete confidentiality.

After receiving approval from the SFU Research Ethics Board regarding this research, I contacted my mother—a *zhongyi* practitioner with deep social connections within my research field. My mother was my gatekeeper, helping me reach out to other potential interlocutors. Moreover, my uncle, Lan, assisted me immensely in propagating my research and establishing social linkages among the participants. The recruitment process occurred between August and November 2022. I asked my mother and Lan to

circulate my recruitment script and interview guide on their social networks to attract potential participants. The personal contact information of potential participants would not be disclosed until they informed the known contacts that they were willing to participate in this study. Once their willingness was received, my WeChat ID was given to them by my mother and Lan. WeChat is the most commonly used communication app in China, and its primary role is to establish contact with potential participants and schedule in-person meetings. Hence, nothing was collected via WeChat as participants' consent and responses were obtained during in-person interviews.

After potential participants accepted my friend request, I introduced myself and my research topic to them. I sent them my interview guides and consent forms, providing a general overview of my interview structure and goals, and then asked their availability to schedule in-person semi-structured interviews. All participants were given sufficient time to decide whether to participate in the research. Then, I adopted the snowball method to ask these primary participants if they knew other *zhongyi* practitioners who might also be interested in joining the research. Although participant recruitment was made through known contacts and mutual friends, the information about who was interviewed for the research was not disclosed to anyone. I made decisions regarding who would be contacted and included in the research, and this was a confidential process. Overall, I ended up interviewing twenty *zhongyi* practitioners.

1.4.2. Data collection and analysis

During the in-person interviews, I reviewed the consent form with my interlocutors step-by-step to ensure their full comprehension of the study. The SFU Office of Research Ethics determined that the research would not pose any additional risks for the participants beyond the "minimal risk" defined in the Tri-Council Policy. I mentioned that participation was voluntary, allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time. They could also request the deletion of any part of the interviews that they no longer wished to share. I explained how their confidentiality would be protected by anonymizing their identities and deleting any information that might raise privacy concerns. Subsequently, I solicited and audio-recorded their oral consent before conducting the interviews.

The interviews typically lasted one to two hours and were conducted in Chinese. I employed open-ended semi-structured interviews and unstructured conversations. These methods allowed my interviewees to respond to open-ended questions, flexibly structure their answers, and speak freely without restrictions. Hence, I received information-rich cases about beautification practices, detailed explanations of *zhongyi* cosmetology, and their application of *zhongyi* psychology to adjust their patients' *xin*. I adopted a “learner” role, enabling my participants to be the experts who directed the orientation of our conversations. I gathered diverse information from different perspectives, which was then used to conceptualize a thematic analysis of the interview data.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese but were subsequently translated into English for data analysis. Only quotes deemed significant for the analysis and reflective of new findings were translated. After completing all the transcriptions, certain themes consistently emerged across different participants. I identified these themes and then used NViVo 12 to conduct thematic coding and identify the connections. I arranged these themes in order, aligning them with the three sections of my interview guide, and prioritized them based on their relevance. I generated a list of interview quotes that were thematically divided and found to be most relevant to the overarching research questions. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

1.5. Chapter review

Overall, I have arranged this thesis into four chapters. The following is a summary of each chapter.

Chapter One: The introductory chapter provides background information, theoretical framework, and methodology. It contextualizes Western psychological terms using their *zhongyi* counterparts, specifying the differences and highlighting the importance of indigenous psychology. It also presents major theories in *Huangdi Neijing*, which form the theoretical foundation for developing my research theories. My theories include affect, Michael Hardt’s affective labour, Jie Yang’s holistic labour, and Chinese scholars’ explanations of *xin*. Furthermore, this chapter presents how I formulated my research questions, located appropriate participants, structured my interview questionnaire, recruited potential interlocutors, and conducted in-person interviews.

Chapter Two: The ethnographic analysis chapter about *xin*. It explores how *zhongyi* practitioners apply *xin*-centered techniques to form affective bonds, which attract their patients to try *zhongyi* beautification practices. The types of hospitals and gender influence how *zhongyi* practitioners connect with their patients and their pace of forming interpersonal bonds. I then provide a case study to illustrate how *zhongyi* practitioner, Dr. Bai, went beyond affective labour and engaged in holistic labour to identify the roots behind her patient, Yi's, beautification requests. Additionally, I examine some key terms mentioned by *zhongyi* practitioners, such as *sixinyan* (死心眼)/"dead-hearted mind", *biantong* (变通)/"change with continuity", and *xintai* (心态)/"heart attitude", to illustrate how zhongyi practitioners cure *xin bing* (心病)/"heartache" and address their patients' desires for beautification practices. My discussions of these key terms rely on Jie Yang's (2015) analysis of *xin, xintai*, and *biantong* in her book, *Unknotting the Heart: Unemployment and Therapeutic Governance in China*. I also examine the methods named *zou xin* (走心)/"passing through *xin*" and *zou shen* (走肾)/"passing through the kidneys", utilized by *zhongyi* practitioners*. Zou xin* is talk therapy, targeting *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation" of *xin* to alleviate *yu* of *xing*. *Zou shen* relies on traditional *zhongyi* practices (acupuncture, moxibustion, scraping therapy, massage, cupping, and herbal medicine) to relieve *yu* of *xing* and to empower *xin*. The two methods allow *zhongyi* practitioners to harmonize the *xin-shen-xing* imbalance and then balance their patients' *xin*, changing their attitudes about the world.

Chapter Three: The ethnographic analysis chapter about *xing*. It introduces concepts such as *wu* (无)/"complete emptiness" and *wuwei* (无为)/"complete emptiness of actions", which are mentioned in *Huangdi Neijing* and related to spiritual freedom in Daoism. These two concepts emphasize the importance of *xin*-cultivation. *Wu* enables *xin* to ponder the shackles imposed by external forces and further motivates *xin* to consider its naturally formed ideas. *Wuwei* emphasizes the "stillness"/*jing* (静) of *xin* in facing various social stimuli. Characteristics of water, such as adaptability and creativity, are discussed with *biantong* (变通)/"change with continuity" to show how *xin* can better adapt to the world. This chapter further introduces *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals, such as *ziran mei* (自然美)/"natural beauty", *qiyun mei* (气韵美)/"the beauty of vitality", *shenyun mei* (神韵美)/"the beauty of spiritual charm", *neizai mei* (内在美)/"inner beauty",

and *zhixing mei* (知性美)/“intellectual beauty”, to challenge the current beauty ideal, *nennu*.

Chapter Four: The summary and conclusion chapter. It presents an overview of key findings and analysis, discusses this research's limitations and contributions, and outlines the focus for future additional research.

Chapter 2.

Heart (*Xin*)-bonding and Holistic Labour

2.1. Introduction

This section introduces how *zhongyi* practitioners form affective bonds with their patients and discusses how factors, such as the types of hospitals and gender, influence the bonding process and its pace.

2.1.1. *Qing* (情)/"affect" between *zhongyi* practitioners and their patients

Huangdi Neijing' s emphasis on *xin* and the *xin*-centered mode of care in *zhongyi* psychology influences how *zhongyi* practitioners establish connections with their patients. This connection begins with *xin*-bonding between the two parties, as the affect of *xin* plays a crucial role in motivating patients to try *zhongyi* cosmetology. *Zhongyi* practitioners employ multiple *xin*-centered techniques to connect with their patients' *xin*. Once established, this affective bond enables patients to accept *zhongyi* practices as suitable for addressing their beautification requests. Dr. Bao explained that the public perceives *zhongyi* cosmetology more as an alternative practice for curing illnesses than as a method for beautification, due to the term "*zhongyi*". He said,

> My patients' ideas about receiving *zhongyi* cosmetology are not very solid. They usually come here for treatments that alleviate their physiological discomfort, not for *zhongyi* beautification practices. While they are interested in hearing about the beautified results, they are hesitant to try these practices. To gain their trust and motivate them, I need to find entry points that connect me with them, showing my concern and care. Hence, communication is crucial, but communicating in the right way with proper direction is even more important.

Dr. Bao's words highlight that his expressions of concern and care establish a bond between him and his patients. This bond includes an affective input that shortens the distance between the two parties' *xin*. Bao emphasizes trust, which is a powerful affect originating from *xin*. Trust fosters faith and commitment, nurturing a willingness to embrace new potentialities despite unknown factors (Giddens, 1991; Baerveldt and Voestermans, 2005; Brinkmann, 2010).

Affect is written as “情感” in Chinese. Its characters include two “hearts”, the radical “忄” and the “心” as the underneath character. This implies that *xin* has an intersubjective function, creating a context that allows affect to be transmitted between two parties (Sundararajan, 2015). Indeed, *xin* is core to the interdependent self in the Chinese context as it links two “bodies” in order to form a real human understood in the Confucian tradition (Sun, 1991). As such, *xin*-bonding has a communicative mode: one “heart” sends sentiments, such as concern and care, to the other, who receives these and accepts the bond between the two parties. To illustrate the care and concern needed in *xin*-bonding, Dr. Tian said that she offered her patients free trials. Tian said,

> Offering free trials helps my patients understand that I am considering their perspective by allowing them to try first. This approach makes them feel comfortable, and they often mention that not all practitioners provide them with such positive experiences.

To express the concern needed to transmit affect, Dr. Lee emphasized the importance of being “kind-hearted”/*ai xin* (爱心). Lee explained,

> It is essential to have *ai xin* and to make your patients feel it. I do that by warm-heartedly listening to their stories, so they have a sense of connection with me. They are willing to share more things with me. Then, they will trust you, choose you, and listen to your advice.

Ai means love in Chinese, so *ai xin* carries another socio-cultural significance: using one heart to love and care for another heart. The involvement of the two parties’ “hearts” fulfills the communicative mode of *xin*-bonding and enables the transmission of affect. Following *zhongyi* psychology’s *xin*-centered approach, practitioners must first activate their patients’ affect to capture their *xin*. Affect enables the transcendence of the physical boundary delineated by the “body”. Practitioners and their patients resonate at the affective level. Activating affect through concern-expressing, trust-building, free trialing, and warm-hearted-listening methods fortifies the strength of *xin*-bonding. Dr. Lee shared the words of one of her female patients, Ma, to discuss the affective aspects of *xin*-bonding. Dr. Lee said,

> My patient, Ma, mentioned that she loves coming here for my beautification practices because of the warm and intimate atmosphere. She said that she doesn’t come here to achieve specific beautified results, but simply feels comfortable staying with me. Our connection is strong, like intimate friends. Sometimes, Ma gives me rice and vegetables as gifts, showing that she cares about me as well.

Dr. Lee's words indicate that *xin*-bonding generates intangible products, "a sense of connectedness" and "a feeling of ease, relaxation, and well-being" (Hardt, 1999, p. 96). Hardt (1999) terms people who produce these intangible products as "affective labour". In this context, *xin*-bonding leads Dr. Bao, Dr. Tian, and Dr. Lee to perform affective labour. The positive affects generated by *xin*-bonding act as a catalyst for patients to consider *zhongyi* beautification practices, as they trust and feel connected to their practitioners. Hence, *xin*-bonding not only fosters psychological closeness between patients and practitioners but also motivates patients to explore *zhongyi* cosmetology at a behavioural level. When bonded with *zhongyi* practitioners, *xin* helps patients finalize their decisions to receive *zhongyi* cosmetology, driven by trust and affective connection. *Xin* is continuously present in the context of *zhongyi* beautification practices, and its affective dimension influences patients' thoughts and behaviors. *Xin* therefore plays a crucial role in helping patients choose *zhongyi* beautification practices

2.1.2. The type of hospitals and the "word of mouth"/*koubei* (口碑) of *zhongyi* practitioners

The type of hospitals influences how *zhongyi* practitioners connect with their patients. "District hospitals"/*qushu yiyuan* (区属医院) involve more affective dimensions than "grade-A tertiary hospitals"/*sanjia yiyuan* (三甲医院). District hospitals are smaller, and use fewer categorizations of illnesses, creating a stronger affective connection between practitioners and patients. Dr. Chen explained,

> In district hospitals, illnesses are specifically classified, so each department deals only with its assigned categories. However, in *qushu yiyuan*, we lack such clear classifications. Patients who receive *zhongyi* beautification practices often experience an imbalance in their *xin-shen-xing* relationship. So, I do not merely offer beautification practices to address their issues of *xing* but also provide suggestions for changing *xin*.

In district hospitals, *zhongyi* practitioners continue to rely on traditional beautification practices. In contrast, those in grade-A tertiary hospitals adopt Western biomedical beautification techniques, such as the use of laser skin resurfacing machines. Dr. Liao criticized grade-A tertiary hospitals,

> Grade-A tertiary hospitals have forgotten our cultural traditions. Additionally, there is a sense of laziness among their practitioners. They rely on Western biomedical technology to address everything. However, this technology only deals with superficial and observable bodily issues; it does not address the

> issues of *xin*. Some issues are non-observable, so they require my attention to identify. Hence, I express my concern to patients and invite them to transform non-observable issues into narratives.

Dr. Liao's statement reflects the result-oriented nature of grade-A tertiary hospitals. Since procedures involving Western biomedical technology have been standardized, the focus is less on who performs the treatment. In contrast, district hospitals are practitioner-oriented, with patients waiting to visit specific *zhongyi* practitioners.

In her interviews, Dr. Lee emphasized the importance of "word of mouth"/*koubei* (口碑), which roughly equates to a good reputation. *Koubei* demonstrates district hospitals' practitioner-oriented focus. Lee said,

> When you have a good *koubei*, your patients will recommend you to their friends. Your good reputation establishes your positive social image in their *xin*. This results in a high level of willingness among patients to try my beautification practices.

Dr. Lee's explanation illustrates that "word of mouth" between patients naturally promotes her beautification practices. According to *Huangdi Neijing*, "*xin* opens through the tongue, and words are the voice of *xin* (心开窍于舌, 言为心之声)". Patients' *koubei* endorses Lee's credibility as their recommendations come from their *xin*. *Koubei* enhances the reliability of *zhongyi* practitioners and makes potential patients trust them even before the beautification practices begin. *Koubei* first activates patients' trust in practitioners, which then motivates patients to try *zhongyi* beautification practices. Hence, *koubei* equals credibility and good reputation, which are crucial in constructing a *zhongyi* practitioner's social image.

2.1.3. Gender and *xin*-bonding

Gender also influences the *xin*-bonding process. Sharing the same gender lowers the bonding threshold between practitioners and patients, particularly between females. This also facilitates the formation of a stable bond. Dr. Lee said,

> Being female myself, I can easily relate to my female patients, and they also like to share more personal information with me. My own experiences enable me to understand why my female patients think in a certain way, what influences their thoughts, and how they feel about themselves. I can also anticipate future challenges they might face and provide examples from my own experiences to illustrate potential solutions.

Sharing the same gender, therefore, enables Lee to easily relate to her female patients' experiences and to speculate on the true roots of their mental and physical *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation". Gender serves as a framework and rationality, which allows female practitioners to provide their female patients with relevant personal experiences. These experiences act as references, illustrations, or solutions that allow patients to understand how they might deal with their life issues.

Gender also influences the pace of *xin*-bonding. Female practitioners more easily form an affective bond with their patients compared to their male counterparts. Dr. Lee said that,

> I never refuse my patients' requests to add me as a contact by exchanging phone numbers or adding me on WeChat because I believe they trust me and want personal contact. Over time, some of my patients have become my friends, and we hang out sometimes.

In contrast, male practitioner, Dr. Jin mentioned,

> As a male practitioner, few people choose to share much information about their life issues with me. If they do, they briefly describe the results they desire, and the beautification practices they want to receive. Hence, my conversations with patients typically center around these topics, and I do my best to meet their expectations.

Therefore, female practitioners engage more intimately with their patients and may even assume the role of a friend. The exchange of private numbers or becoming friends via WeChat strengthens personal bonds. However, Dr. Lee explained how she felt a sense of alienation as a result of maintaining affective connections with her patients. She said,

> Being a *zhongyi* practitioner requires outgoing and talkative people. I am a talkative person, but that part of me is dedicated to my patients. Once I am home, I prefer to stay silent. Well... I only exhibit outgoing traits during work. All my energy is devoted to my patients, and excessive talking can leave me breathless.

Male practitioner, Dr. Jin, described a different scenario during his interviews to illustrate how he would deal with intense conversations with his patients,

> I tend to limit the duration of conversations with my patients, and most of my patients are women. If they go off-topic, I will interrupt them and ask them to describe their needs and expectations. I am not able to provide solutions to their life issues. However, I still offer general advice, such as 'all things will end someday' or 'try not to take things too seriously'. Then, I move on to suggest my beautification practices; if the patients agree to the proposed treatment, we then

> proceed with it. They need to take care of themselves as no one can truly address their issues for them.……

According to Jin's narrative, he does not share personal experiences to connect with his patients. He also interrupts his female patients' monologues and tries to distance himself from their narratives. In doing so, he becomes less emotionally exploitable than female practitioners, such as Dr. Lee. Another male practitioner, Dr. Chen, said,

> If I receive a female patient seeking emotional support and asking for life advice during beautification practices, I advise her to seek treatments from a female practitioner. I have limited knowledge in advising female patients, as my expertise lies in fulfilling their beautification requests.

Dr. Chen's statement indicates that he cannot easily relate to female patients' personal experiences. He also believes that female patients tend to communicate better with female practitioners. Another male practitioner, Dr. Luo agreed with Chen and said,

> When female patients see that their *zhongyi* practitioners are male, they tend to talk less compared to when they are with female practitioners.

Hence, gender influences how *zhongyi* practitioners interact and communicate with their patients. Female practitioners disclose their personal experiences to express empathy, helping them establish an affective connection with their female patients. Male practitioners typically provide general advice, demonstrating a preference for using logic and rationale to persuade their patients. However, their advice still targets *xin*, aiming to create "a feeling of ease" (Hardt, 1999, p. 96). Male practitioners aim to direct their patients' attention away from their issues and promote relaxation.

The influence *zhongyi* practitioners have on their patients is not limited to the affective realm. Building affective connections with practitioners, listening to their suggestions, and receiving *zhongyi* beautification can transform how patients view their social worlds. In her research on China's booming "beauty economy"/*meinu jingji* (美女经济) and beauty care workers, Yang (2017) promotes the concept of "holistic labour" to contextualize heart-centered affective labour. She proposes that beauty care workers are expected to provide "holistic service"/*quanfangwei fuwu* (全方位服务) and give their clients extra emotional, psychological, and moral support. This also applies to *zhongyi* practitioners, as they are expected to be mentors, professionals, confidantes, friends, and counsellors to their patients. Their duties are not limited to implementing

beautification practices. The next section examines how they perform holistic labour (Yang, 2017) and engage *zhongyi* psychology to balance their patients' *xin-shen-xing* relationship.

2.2. Between affective labour and holistic labour

Applying Yang's concept of holistic labour to my research, *zhongyi* practitioners use their patient's demand for beautification to identify the crux of their *xin-shen-xing* imbalance. They harmonize that imbalance by applying traditional beautification practices and the *xin*-centered mode of care of *zhongyi* psychology. This section presents a case study of the holistic labour performed by the *zhongyi* practitioner, Dr. Bai.

In February 2023, I visited Dr. Bai at her office in Shenyang. At the time, a female patient named Yi was receiving beautification treatments from Dr. Bai to alleviate her facial paralysis. According to Dr. Bai, Yi was an international student studying abroad, with her new semester set to begin within a week. Dr. Bai said,

> In that sense, Yi would need to leave China as soon as possible. However, she kept claiming that her facial paralysis had not been cured and was still affecting her appearance. She extended her treatment sessions and rescheduled her flight multiple times, for which her parents blamed me. Her parents viewed me as the culprit since I kept performing beautification practices on Yi. They came to my office, asked me to stop my treatment sessions, and inquired as to why I kept performing them for Yi. Her parents said to me, "The doctor at the grade-A tertiary hospital has stated that my daughter's face is symmetrical, so she does not need to come and receive *zhongyi* beautification anymore. Why are you still treating her?" I explained that Yi's facial paralysis reflects the *yu* (stagnation) of her *xin*. Hence, I continued to perform my practices in order to empower her *xin*.

Dr. Bai then gave more context to illustrate how she identified Yi's mental health problems, provided Yi with emotional support, and helped reconcile Yi's family issues,

> Every time Yi came for my beautification treatments, she would go to the mirror and check her face multiple times, often saying things like "Why does my face look lifeless?" and "I want my old face back"… Yi's facial paralysis wasn't as severe as she described, and her obsession with her face was unusual, so I was sure that something had happened to her. I asked her about it to show my care and concern. Yi revealed her strong feelings of insecurity and anxiety by saying, "My face is still uneven, and I'm afraid to see my male friends; I want my face to be perfectly symmetrical." She also mentioned to me that her facial symptoms had appeared after her breakup with her boyfriend and arguments with her friends. Additionally, she had rejected her parents' offer to accompany her during the treatment sessions ... It was obvious that Yi's distress stemmed from her

> issues with her social circle, and her family's dysfunctional communication exacerbated that. So, I told her parents, "As Yi's parents, you should talk to her more frequently and pay attention to her mental state. If we push Yi to leave China when her *xin* is torn up inside, I am afraid that she will do something unexpected and extreme."

Dr. Bai's narrative shows that Yi established a causal link between her interpersonal dysfunction and facial paralysis. In Chinese thought, social tensions are routinely expressed as bodily discomfort—a phenomenon known as somatization (Brownell, 1995; Yang, 2017). The pressure arising from Yi's social environment permeated her body, manifesting as facial paralysis. Dr. Bai identified the social origin of Yi's bodily discomfort, and in addition to implementing beautification treatments, expressed concern about Yi's thoughts and tried to cure her *xin* by asking Yi's parents to pay closer attention to their daughter's mental health.

Dr. Bai's narrative illustrates that the holistic work performed by *zhongyi* practitioners typically involves identifying the mental root of physical discomfort, adjusting and reconciling social relationships, providing psychological guidance, and promoting adaptation to the surrounding environment. Bai said,

> There is little I can do. Ultimately, it is up to Yi to adjust her mindset and face her life. Having a strong *xin* (heart) and positive *xintai* (heart attitude) enables you to better deal with all kinds of challenges and difficulties in life. Life is a long journey, and the problems you face now will not last forever; you should have a big *xin* that has tolerance, patience, and inclusiveness.

Another practitioner, Dr. Liu, also discussed *xintai* in his interviews,

> When people seek beautification treatments, especially under external influences, it suggests that their *xin* is not strong enough to resist external distractions. Developing an adaptable *xintai* that can withstand all kinds of comments makes you immune to these influences.

In her research on mental health issues in China, Yang (2015) translated *xintai* as "heart attitude" to underscore the decisive role of *xin* in shaping an individual's perspective on life, relationships, or specific situations. The word *tai* (态), meaning attitude, describes the dynamic reactions of *xin* to external stimuli. Jin discussed the nature of *tai* in his interview,

> *Tai* is the methodology of *zhongyi*. It is also the key to living a happy life. It is all about how you think. If you do not care about social beauty standards, they will not influence you. The reason why my female patients seek my beautification treatments is that they care about the ideals of fair skin, youthfulness, and

> slimness. Their *xin* also believes that these bodily qualities are beautiful, so they pursue beautification.

According to Yang (2015), *xintai* is a relational concept whose affective bearing is oriented toward the world. *Xintai* is dynamic and fluid, adapting to changes in the external environment; it encompasses both private, self-related aspects and public, world-related elements. Based on Yang's understanding of *xintai*, I argue that *xin* first understands its positionality within the environment and then develops an appropriate "attitude"/*tai* (态) to achieve desired outcomes. Hence, *xintai* underscores the dynamics of *xin* in forming different attitudes during the process of perceiving the outer world. *Xin* can adjust its *tai* based on its positionality and changes in the surrounding environment.

2.2.1. *Sixinyan* (死心眼)/"dead-hearted mind" and *xintai* (心态)/"heart attitude"

Yang (2015) posits that modulating *xintai* is the first step in changing how one interacts with the world. In Dr. Chen's interviews, he used the term "dead-hearted mind"/*sixinyan* (死心眼) to describe patients who were unable to adopt a new *xintai* with which to view things. *Sixinyan* refers to people who are single-minded, rigid, stubborn, and inflexible. As Chen noted,

> Many patients who come for *zhongyi* cosmetology are *sixinyan*, as they pursue a particular beauty ideal promoted by social media and do not consider other forms of beauty. Ultimately, it always comes down to a matter of *xin*. It is essential to look at things with an open heart and have a *xintai* of *biantong* to accept diversity.

Yang (2015) translated *biantong* (变通) as "change with continuity." It describes "the process of becoming from one event to another." This process encompasses "dialectical thinking, correlative pairing, and conceptual interactions of complementary contrasts" (Yang, 2015, p. 7). The process by which *xin* modulates its "attitude"/*tai* (态) from "rigidity and stoicism" to "flexibility, fluidity, or gentleness" displays *biantong* (Yang, 2015, p. 8). Changes must always occur in *xin* first. Adopting a flexible and fluid *xin* is a precondition for acquiring *biantong* and developing a positive *xintai*. In Dr. Liu's interviews, he said,

> *Zhongyi* treats patients by regulating their *xintai*. What I can do is take a holistic view of my patients' lifestyles, family relationships, social circles, and work environments. Then, I try to identify the external factors that lead to their beautification requests. It all boils down to chatting with them to have a comprehensive understanding of their social lives. External factors are non-

> controllable, so changing their *xintai* is the key. While we may not solve external problems directly, we can address how *xin* perceives them. This is achieved by assisting them in developing a flexible *xintai* and acquiring *biantong*.

When *xin* adopts *biantong* (变通)/"change with continuity" and changes its *tai* (态)/"attitude" toward external stimuli, it further smooths the movement of *qi* and eliminates the *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation" of *xin* and *xing*. Thus, having a flexible and adaptable *xintai* that displays *biantong* is the key to preventing the occurrence of mental and physical *yu*.

2.2.2. The will of *xin*, *zhiweibing* (治未病)/"preventing physiological disease before it occurs", and *faxin* (发心)/"xin-orientation"

Biantong exhibits three characteristics: flexibility, adaptability, and resilience. *Biantong* allows people to adjust and handle problems flexibly based on context rather than strictly applying fixed rules or methods. This also implies the importance of creativity in finding appropriate context-specific solutions. *Biantong* enables people to see connections between seemingly unrelated concepts and to analyze them from a fresh perspective (Yang, 2015). *Huangdi Neijing* claims that the will of *xin* shapes the outcome, so *zhongyi* practitioners treat *xinbing* to prevent physiological disease before it occurs. This process is named *zhiweibing* (治未病), which prevents the onset of disease by addressing early signs of *xin–shen–xing* imbalance. It aims to modulate patients' *xintai* and enable them to properly perceive external stimuli. Dr. Chen emphasized *biantong* by discussing the connections between *sixinyan* and the onset of future disease,

> *Sixinyan* results in a non-negotiable dead end. To avoid this, one must be dynamic and flexible. This is what I currently practice through *zhiweibing* (preventing diseases before they occur). *Zhiweibing* enables my patients to better handle similar problems that they may encounter later in life. By preparing their *xin* to manage these challenges, they can maintain overall health and balance in the future.

Zhiweibing advocates that the current *xin–shen–xing* imbalance indicates the progression of future disease. Adjusting *xintai* in the present can address future disease, so *zhiweibing* adopts a future-centric way of thinking that transcends temporal and spatial limitations. *Zhongyi* practitioners address their patients' current issues from a perspective that considers both present and future. Dr. Tian uses *faxin* (发心), literally

“heart/*xin*-orientation,” to discuss how *xin*’s will leads patients to achieve certain future outcomes. Dr. Tian explained,

> A positive *xin* leads to positive outcomes, and a negative *xin* generates negative results. Hence, the orientation of *xin* determines your will/*zhi* and the kinds of results you will experience, as *xin* directs your actions. *Faxin* is a decision-making process because it outlines the potential outcomes you might receive based on your *xintai*. *Xintai* predetermines how you engage with your environment, and *xin* assists you in making further judgments and decisions.

Dr. Tian’s explanation underscores the agentive and deterministic role of *xin* in shaping future outcomes. As with *zhiweibing*, *faxin* also possesses a future-centric way of thinking. Dr. Luo explained how *faxin* was linked to his beautification treatments,

> I always advise my patients to think about their future when they decide to undergo certain intrusive Euro-American biomedical beautification treatments. Some of the negative effects may not immediately impact their lives but will gradually become evident as they age. Social media advertisements promote these intrusive Western practices as effective, but there are also cases of failures exposed online. Some negative influences of Euro-American biomedical beautification practices only become apparent after several years. Each age group has its unique beauty, so do not sacrifice your future self to fulfill your present desires.

This future-centric way of thinking shifts the emphasis from patients’ current desires, which may lead them to undergo invasive beautification treatments, and broadens their perspectives by making them more aware of the potential future consequences of engaging in such treatments. Considering the failed treatments experienced by others may cause them to question whether it is worth taking the risk to achieve a current beauty ideal through such means and reconsider whether they should undergo invasive Western procedures. Sundararajan (2015) notes that knowing is doing: awareness of the disadvantages of invasive procedures leads patients to opt for non-invasive alternatives. Dr. Luo further explained why he discusses the potential negative results associated with invasive procedures,

> Some of my patients may think that I am trying to market my *zhongyi* beautification practices to them, so I list several drawbacks of Western biomedical practices. However, the reality is that I have treated several female patients suffering from facial vascular embolisms due to the injection of novel substances during Western medical sessions. These women seek acupuncture treatment from me to improve their facial conditions. I empathize with them, but their skin tissue has already been damaged, so the effectiveness of acupuncture is also limited. I mention the drawbacks of Western biomedical practices to instill caution in female patients who may not be aware of the potential consequences.

Dr. Luo's words indicate that arousing his female patients' concerns about the potential negative consequences of invasive beautification treatments changes their *xintai* about whether to undergo such treatments. This method uses communication to adjust how their "hearts" view these practices. This is *zhongyi* psychology's talk therapy, which has a top-down direction. This approach targets *xin* and enables new perspectives directed by *zhongyi* practitioners to pass through their patients' *xin* and change their perspectives. *Zhongyi* practitioners name this process *zou xin* (走心).

In contrast, the bottom-up method *zou shen* (走肾), or "passing through the kidney," targets *xing* by using beautification practices to alleviate bodily discomfort, thereby further treating *xin*. Both approaches balance the patients' overall *xin–shen–xing* relationship. *Zou xin* relies on talk therapy to change *xintai*. In addition, *zhongyi* practitioners aim to cultivate their patients' flexibility, adaptability, and resilience by stressing the importance of *biantong*. These all prevent the progression of the future bodily discomfort addressed by *zhiweibing*. *Zou shen* targets bodily (*xing*) discomfort and then uses beautification treatments to alleviate *xing*'s *yu* 瘀/"stagnation". Alleviating *yu* of *xing* can subsequently empower *xin* by enhancing *qi* and blood flow. This can further adjust the negative emotions of *xin* caused by external social pressure. The following section explores these connections and their applications.

2.3. Zou xin (走心)/"passing through the heart" and *zou shen* (走肾)/"passing through the kidney"

In her interviews, Dr. Lee explained the idea of *zou xin* to describe how her suggestions aroused her patients' affect in order to change their thoughts and intentions,

> *Zou xin* activates the affect of my patients' *xin*, which helps them understand that my suggestions are given from their perspectives. The affect of their *xin* directs their will, so they embrace my advice and guidance to better deal with their surroundings.

Dr. Lee indicates that *zou xin* motivates patients to act in accordance with her suggestions. *Zou xin* typically appears when someone offers sincere and constructive advice to another person. The *Huangdi Neijing* states that "the heart lodges in the ears (心寄窍于耳)." Yang (2023) explains that hearing is connected to *xin*, and hearing advice

is synonymous with understanding that advice (p.10). *Zou xin*'s affective–cognitive involvement guides patients to follow their practitioners' advice. Dr. Liu explained,

> As long as you can explain it clearly, you can cure it. What effects do my practices achieve? My answer would be to solve the person if you cannot solve the problem. And how do we solve the problem? Through words, all kinds of explanations, to reconcile the emotional fluctuations, balance *xin* and change its *tai* in relation to the problem.

Dr. Liu's words demonstrate that practitioners' suggestions transform their patients' *xintai*. In *zhongyi* psychology, this method is called talk therapy. This therapy targets *xin* and encompasses affective input to alter *xin*'s perception of external stimuli. Lee introduced an affective technique named *yiqing shengqing* (以情胜情) during her interviews. It refers to the use of a specific affect to harmonize another prevailing affective state. The *Huangdi Neijing* states that affects mutually restrain each other: "sadness overcomes anger, anger overcomes contemplation, contemplation overcomes fear, fear overcomes joy, and joy overcomes sadness" (悲胜怒，怒胜思，思胜恐，恐胜喜，喜胜悲). Relying on this counter-balancing relationship, Dr. Lee applied *yiqing shengqing* to treat her female patient Zhang's facial chloasma. Lee explained,

> I am aware that Zhang is not only a wife but also a mother, so I always tell her not to think about her husband, as her child needs more of her attention. This suggestion redirects her focus from her husband to her child, who depends on her care and needs her love. Zhang's role as a mother can generate a sense of joyfulness, which harmonizes the distress and sadness caused by her role as a wife.

Dr. Lee's suggestions directly influenced Zhang's cognition and affect. Lee emphasized Zhang's role as a mother, evoking her love for her child; the positive affect of love made Zhang less sensitive to triggers related to her husband, concurrently shifting her *xintai* from that of a distressed wife to that of a loving mother. As Sun (1991) points out, Chinese culture underscores a collective framework involving two individuals, in which a sense of completion is achieved through the presence of another individual. *Yiqing shengqing*, as applied by Dr. Lee, shifted Zhang's focus from the wife–husband dyad to the mother–child one. The evoked joy counterbalanced Zhang's sadness over her husband's infidelity and alleviated the facial chloasma caused by the distress of her *xin. Zou xin*, therefore, identifies the social–psychological causes of patients' requests for beautification treatments and addresses the *yu* 瘀/ "stagnation" of *xin*. It adopts the

counter-balancing influences of different affects to harmonize patients' *xin* and balance their *xintai*.

Affect possesses a physiological dimension, manifesting as *qi* and blood flow. The method of *zou shen* aims to harmonize blood and *qi* flow, empowering the functions of the physiological organ, the heart, to further strengthen its spiritual dimensions, *xin* and *shen*. According to the *Huangdi Neijing*, "the kidneys are the corresponding internal organs of the ears (肾开窍于耳)" and "they store essence, which further transforms into *qi* (肾藏精，精化气)." The affective changes resulting from hearing and understanding suggestions actively impact the circulation of blood and *qi* in the kidneys. In order to smooth the flow of *qi* and blood corresponding to affective changes, Dr. Lee used traditional *zhongyi* practices such as acupuncture. This alleviates the physiological *yu* caused by the irregular flow of *qi* and blood. Lee continued to use Zhang's case as an example to explain her understanding of *zou shen*,

> My suggestions arouse Zhang's affect, which leads to a change in *qi* flow. This *qi* change then affects the kidneys. Acupuncture smooths the *qi* flow and regulates kidney function. The kidneys connect with the heart through meridians, *qi*, and blood flow. Treating the kidneys and *qi* flow empowers the heart's physiological and spiritual functions. Acupuncture also stimulated Zhang's self-healing system to support the transformation of her *xintai*. Hence, my beautification treatments balance Zhang's overall mental and physical health.

The combination of *zou xin* and *zou shen* alleviated Zhang's mental and physiological *yu*. Throughout Dr. Lee's sessions with Zhang, she performed holistic work to identify the social origins of Zhang's distress. She provided Zhang with "holistic care" (Yang, 2017). For *zou xin*, Dr. Lee adopted *yiqing shengqing* to unknot the *yu* of Zhang's *xin*. For *zou shen*, Dr. Lee applied acupuncture to regulate *qi* flow and alleviated the *yu* of Zhang's *xing*. Combining *zou xin* and *zou shen* during beautification treatments balanced Zhang's *xin* and harmonized her *xin-shen-xing* imbalance.

Dr. Liu also discussed *zou shen* in his interviews, explaining how herbal medicines stabilize *shen* and nurture *xin* by working directly with physiological *qi*,

> I use herbal formulas, such as "bupleurum liver-soothing pills"/*chaihu shugan wan* (柴胡舒肝丸) and "rambling powder"/*xiaoyao san* (逍遥散), to help my patients drink away their thoughts. These medicines target *qi* flow, making *qi* remain stable. *Qi*'s inability to change stabilizes affects, allowing *xin* to stay calm and thought-free. This helps temporarily relieve them from their personal issues.

Dr. Liu's *zou shen* relies on herbal medicine administered during his beautification treatments to control the physiologically rising and descending movement of *qi* in a bottom-up manner, thereby regulating *xin'*s affect and will. The expression "make my patients drink away their thoughts (把想法喝没)," reveals how changes to *qi* can further address *xin* issues. This is different from *zou xin*, since *zou shen* targets *qi* to inversely affect *xin* and alleviate mental issues.

Overall, this chapter offers a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of *xin* treatment during *zhongyi* beautification practices. The next chapter examines *xing*. In the discussion, I connect *tai* with *xing* to form the word *xingtai* (形态), roughly translated as bodily performance. I use *xingtai* to discuss the beauty ideal proposed by *zhongyi* cosmetology, which stresses *ziran mei* (自然美)/"natural beauty" and accepts a diversity of physical appearances. *Zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals do not adhere to a singular standard, so I use *xingtai* to refer to the diversity of beauty ideals and physical appearances. The following section discusses desirable bodily qualities from the perspectives of *zhongyi* practitioners and examines how these qualities differ from the fair skin, slimness, and youthfulness idealized by *nennu*. In light of the *xin*-centered mode of care in *zhongyi* psychology and the beauty ideals of *zhongyi* cosmetology, I also discuss how *xin* negotiates between external social pressure to pursue a social beauty ideal (*nennu*) and the self-acceptance advocated by *ziran mei*.

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Chapter 3.

Xintai (心态) and *xingtai* (形态)

3.1. Connections between *tai* (态) and *xing* (形)

Besides using *xintai* to describe how *xin* responds to external stimuli, *zhongyi* practitioner, Dr. Bao discussed how *tai* relates to *xing* in his interview, stating

> *Zhongyi* cosmetology believes in the idea of, *qianren qiantai* (千人千态), roughly described as "a thousand people, a thousand different bodily appearances and heart attitudes." Hence, the diversity of *tai* is manifested in both *xing* and *xin*. *Xintai* refers to how people with different *xin* view things differently, while *xingtai* describes the different appearances among people. *Zhongyi* believes that external appearance is connected to internal organ functioning. The differences in each person's internal organ functioning can lead to variations in their outward appearance. Hence, *zhongyi* promotes the notion that everyone's *tai* is unique. Proposing a singular beauty standard for *xingtai* and valorizing bodily qualities such as fair skin, slimness, and youthfulness as ideal are inappropriate since individual differences are not considered. We need to contextualize each person's unique social environment and bodily functioning to implement *zhongyi* beautification practices, which embrace individual uniqueness and differences.

Bao's explanation indicates that *zhongyi* beautification practices value uniqueness and originality, avoiding homogenizing everyone's appearance according to a singular beauty ideal. Following Bao's words, I also adopt *xingtai* to refer to appearances and highlight the uniqueness of each *xing*.

Dr. Teng mentioned that preserving each person's unique characteristics is the core principle of his *zhongyi* beautification practices,

> During my beautification practices, I enhance patients' appearances rather than transforming them into someone else, so they will not experience a significant change. I strive for improvement, making people look healthier and better, while keeping their original selves. That is the idea of *ziran mei* (自然美)/"natural beauty". It also indicates the idea of *ziran* (自然)/"being natural", being yourself.

Teng's words highlight that his beautification practices follow the current trend of *ziran mei*. Introducing *ziran mei* allows patients to consider how the social beauty ideal (*nennu* 嫩女/"tender women") and its desirable bodily qualities contradict their natural *xingtai*. Teng's interpretation of *ziran* follows Liu's (2022) description of it as self-going, free, spontaneous, and natural. Teng explains *ziran* as "being yourself," which cultivates

individuality and uniqueness. *Ziran* enables *xin* as introspecting on the social expectations of *xingtai* and the influences of such expectations. This introspection allows *xin* to distinguish its naturally formed ideas from the social expectations imposed. Dr. Bai discussed how *xin* achieves this by engaging *Huangdi Neijing*,

> *Huangdi Neijing*, in its first chapter, mentions *tiandan xuwu* (恬淡虚无). From a psychological perspective, this phrase illustrates how people should deal with external stimuli. The superficial understanding of this phrase is to not care about anything, but this is unrealistic. We are not heartless; we care about our surroundings. The key is *xin*-cultivation; we need to cultivate *xin* to make it unshakable under the multi-dimensional influences of social factors.

Yang (2015) translated *tiandan xuwu* as "people should cultivate a quiet *xin* against any distractions." *Wu* (无) in this phrase originates from Daoism, and Allan (1997) translated it as "complete emptiness." *Wu* denotes the removal of all external oppressions and implies spiritual freedom (Allan, 1997). It emphasizes *xin*'s detachment from social influences, being free from desires and thoughts. Hence, *xin* cultivation is the prerequisite to achieving the state of *wu*. I argue that Daoism does not encourage *xin* to completely ignore external forces; instead, it shifts focus to the inner workings of *xin*, promoting it agentive role and autonomous power. This perspective views *xin's* energy as sufficiently strong to override external social influence. People can cultivate *xin* to empower themselves and counterbalance the social pressure imposed on them. *Wu* fosters *xin* in a state devoid of distractions, which encourages *xin* to avoid an excessive focus on external influences. It emphasizes the role of *xin* in navigating between its naturally formed ideas and externally imposed social pressure.

Contextualizing *wu* in my research, the *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideal (*ziran mei*) and the idea of *ziran* (being yourself) transform patients' *xintai* in relation to their *xingtai*. Patients learn to embrace their authentic selves, accept the diversity of bodily appearances, and disregard the discrepancies compared to *nennu* and its idealized bodily qualities. The originality and self-acceptance promoted by *ziran mei* and *ziran* empower *xin* to balance itself in a triadic relationship between *xin* and the world, *xin* and *xing*, and *xing* and the world. Dr. Jin mentioned,

> Daoism cultivates one's *xing* but also relies on *xin* -cultivation. In my beautification practices, I always emphasize the importance of accepting one's natural *xingtai*. Undergoing Western biomedical practices to alter bodily shape can lead to potentially irreparable damage. Accepting the natural *xingtai* and not overly considering the social beauty ideal, *nennu*, can help balance *xin*, further enabling *xin* to accept the natural bodily appearance.

Hence, *zhongyi* practitioners rely on *wu* from *Huangdi Neijing* and Daoism to emphasize the importance of *xin* -cultivation. The next section discusses the Daoist appreciation of water, whose characteristics serve as an example for *xin* to emulate.

3.1.1. *Xin*-cultivation and water

In Daoism, Lao Zi uses natural phenomena – predominantly water – as metaphors to illustrate how *xin* should be cultivated and the qualities it should acquire. Allan (1997) interpreted the Daoist metaphor as emphasizing that water's adaptability allows it to transform shape and interact with its surroundings without being destroyed. Eppert and Wang (2007) claimed that this adaptability signifies the creative energy of water, which does not reside in aggressive domination but rather its dynamic interplay with that what is different from itself. The concept of *biantong* (变通)/"change with continuity" – discussed in chapter two – is associated with these two characteristics of water. *Bian* (变) – roughly translated as "change" – emphasizes the creativity of *xin*, while *tong* (通) – roughly translated as "continuity" – underscores the adaptability of *xin*. *Bian* highlights *xin*'s agentive role in evaluating current situations and developing creative methods, while *tong* describes how *xin* adjusts its ideas to adapt to different circumstances.

Water's adaptability allows it to coexist with different elements, spread everywhere without intentionally acting, and naturally sustain life (Allan, 1997). Daoism refers to water's state of not intentionally acting as *wuwei* (无为), which Allan (1997) translated as a "complete emptiness of actions." According to her interpretation, *wuwei* displays water's ability to take the shape of whatever contains it, signifying flexibility and suppleness (Allan, 1997). More importantly, water naturally possesses these qualities without the need for artificial interventions. This relates to the idea of *ziran*, highlighting the spontaneous, self-going state that exhibits a natural trajectory without deliberate disturbances or interruptions. Hence, *wuwei* describes a person's ability to adapt to their social environments without conscious actions and extra efforts (Allan, 1997, p. 49). For *xin*, being *ziran* means remaining still and balanced, adhering to its natural trajectory regardless of external changes in its surroundings.

Zhuang Zi adopts *jing* (静) – literally “stillness” – to describe a balanced *xin*. According to Allan (1997), *jing* is a desirable attribute for *xin*, enabling it to remain unaffected by external stimuli. *Huangdi Neijing* states: “A quiet mind can smooth the *qi* flow and guard spirit intact; thus, how could any diseases develop? (恬淡虚无，真气从之，精神内守，病安从来)”. Hence, the stillness of *xin* allows it to achieve spiritual freedom and remain immune to diseases. Furthermore, Dr. Bai connected the stillness of *xin* with *zhun* (准) – literally “accurate” – stating,

> Do not make any decisions when you are experiencing strong affective disturbances. Affects influence your cognitive thinking process, making you more emotional and less rational. This can lead you to undertake more extreme actions than usual. It is better to do nothing; do not let your affects take over you. Gradually let the affects dissipate. Make decisions when *xin* becomes still again.

Bai’s narrative suggests that thoughts are most accurate when *xin* is free from affective disturbances. Bai’s phrase “better to do nothing” is an alternative expression of *wuwei*, extending the time before *xing* acts in response to the affects of *xin*. This approach refrains patients from the urge to intervene in their affects, giving their *xin* extra time to rethink and reconsider. During the “doing nothing” period, *xin* is expected to reconcile discrepancies arising from outer forces and inner thoughts. Affects dissipate over time, with *xin* gaining increasing clarity, allowing individuals to more distinctly understand their *xin* and *zhi* (will). Bai’s explanation of extending the decision-executing process demonstrates how *xin* helps to clarify one’s thoughts by not actively engaging in decisions or actions in response to arousal affects. The next section discusses *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals.

3.2. *Ziran mei* (自然美)/“natural beauty” and health

Zhongyi practitioners follow the current trend of *ziran mei* (“natural beauty”) to implement their beautification practices. Dr. Liu believes that the beauty ideal of *ziran mei* transforms his patients’ *xintai* about their *xingtai*,

> *Ziran mei* promotes self-acceptance, leading to a multifaceted beauty ideal that embraces individual uniqueness and diverse manifestations of *xing*. The beauty standards of *zhongyi* cosmetology are not standardized, as they do not use celebrities who conform to *nennu* as templates.

Liu’s words show that *ziran mei* advocates viewing oneself with a tolerant *xintai* and not comparing oneself with others, such as celebrities. This implies harmonizing oneself with

social influences and accepting the discrepancies between one's natural *xingtai* and the socially promoted beauty ideal embodied by celebrities.

Accepting discrepancies between the natural self and *nennu* illustrates *he* (和), literally translated as "harmony." Sundararajan (2013) argued that *he* allows controversial ideas to coexist and parallel each other in proper, moderate proportion, thereby embracing tolerance. Based on Sundararajan's explanation, I argue that *ziran mei* makes people aware that *nennu* represents the ideal beauty, while encouraging acceptance of their natural *xingtai* and bodily differences from *nennu*. This is achieved through empowering *xin*, which balances oneself in relation to one's surroundings through *bian* and *tong*. *Ziran mei* challenges the three idealized bodily qualities of *nennu* (fair skin, slimness, and youthfulness) by accentuating individual uniqueness, which cannot be generalized into defined characteristics. It provides patients with new options rather than new solutions, allowing them to consider alternative beauty ideals instead of simply adhering to *nennu*.

The consideration of alternative beauty ideals rests upon self-reflective consciousness, in which *xin* "gets out of the cognitive entrapment of its own making by stepping back from received problems and solutions to explore new perspectives on the situation" (Sundararajan, 2015, p. 179). Hence, when exposed to *ziran mei*, patients are encouraged to distance themselves from the social pressure to conform to *nennu*. The self-acceptance highlighted by *ziran mei* encourages patients to gain increased tolerance for their own *xingtai* rather than instantly beautifying their *xing* to achieve *nennu*. Choosing not to actively engage in beautification practices to pursue *nennu* reflects *wuwei*, symbolizing a higher level of *xin* awareness. *Xin* situates itself between – and compares – the two beauty ideals of *nennu* and *ziran mei*. The guiding role of *xin* and its effort to balance social pressure on xingtai fosters *xin's* individuality, uniqueness, and independence. The broader range of beauty ideals presented by *ziran mei* helps *xin* to recognize that beauty should not be confined to a single form, as represented by *nennu*.

In addition to promoting *ziran mei* as a beauty ideal in *zhongyi* cosmetology, Dr. Bao, Dr. Teng, and Dr. Liu highlighted health's importance as another beauty standard. Dr. Bao stated,

> When my patients express their desire for beautification practices, it is challenging to focus solely on treating their appearances because *xin*, *shen*, and *xing* are inseparable. Therefore, I prioritize achieving a balanced and healthy state in my practices.

Dr. Teng also discussed how he prioritized health over beauty,

> In my *zhongyi* beautification practices, I prioritize *yi* (医), meaning medicine, and then *mei* (美), meaning beautification.

In his interviews, Dr. Liu emphasized health as the foundation for achieving *ziran mei*,

> Above all, good health is the basis for achieving *ziran mei*. For instance, having red lips and white teeth signifies vitality and reflects one's spirit, which is essential for beauty. Conversely, going out in the morning with noticeable eye bags and dark circles may not be perceived as attractive. This raises the question: What characteristics of health serve as a clear indicator of beauty? The answer is undefined, as true health is a feeling that manifests through the natural flow of *qi* within the body. Health is embodied through various manifestations, so it is not limited to specific characteristics.

These explanations underscore the importance of health in *zhongyi* beautification practices. Additionally, *zhongyi* psychology theory – *sancai zhengti* – highlights the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and society. Hence, adhering to natural laws and harmonizing with natural rhythms form the foundations of Dr. Bai's beautification practices. Bai explained,

> When my patients want to reduce their facial edema or other facial conditions, I usually schedule these appointments in the morning to follow the natural rhyme, which could maximize the efficaciousness of my practices. If some of my patients want to reduce wrinkles, I usually perform my practices between one and three o'clock in the afternoon. *Huangdi Neijing* suggests this time as an ideal period for reducing wrinkles, as the large intestine meridian is active in the afternoon. I perform acupuncture based on the time of our meridian circulation. *Zhongyi* cosmetology believes that implementing beautification practices at their optimal time could achieve an ideal result. I am not just beautifying; I adjust their overall internal system functioning and smooth their *qi* flow. Once the internal organs are harmonized and *qi* flow is stabilized, there will definitely be an improvement in their facial appearance. It is all about promoting overall health, not just enhancing external beauty.

In their interviews, Dr. Liu and Dr. Bai emphasized the importance of *qi* flow, which illustrates another beauty ideal in *zhongyi* cosmetology called *qiyun mei* (气韵美), roughly translated as "the beauty of vitality." The next section provides a detailed analysis of *qiyun mei* through a case study.

3.3. *Qiyun mei* (气韵美)/“the beauty of vitality”

Yang et al. (2016) stated that *qiyun mei* (气韵美)/“the beauty of vitality” symbolizes a healthy state achieved through a regular *qi* flow. This alternative social beauty ideal allows patients to engage in self-observation since they can feel the changes in *qi* circulation and contemplate how external social stimuli influence their well-being. Hence, they can regulate their *xintai* to control *qi* movement, ensuring their *xing’s* normal functioning. This inward direction shifts patients’ focus from absorbing external beauty standards to thinking about how their *xin* and *xing* respond to these standards, manifested as changes in *qi* flow. Dr. Bai discussed the questions “How do I look?” and “How do I feel?” to explain *qiyun mei*,

> “How do I look?” is an outward projection that depends on the responses given by the external environment to make the necessary beautification adjustments on *xingtai*. “How do I feel?” is an inward one that prioritizes one’s own feelings and thoughts. However, “How do I feel?” is more complex than simply an inward projection, as it allows patients to reconsider their reasons for constantly pursuing *nennu*.

Bai’s words indicate that the question “How do I feel?” implies a state of savouring, reflecting the notion of *pin wei* (品味). According to Sundararajan (2015), *pin wei* invites thinking and reflection, emphasizing the reflexivity and intentionality of *xin*. A significant characteristic of *pin wei* is its “relatively wider scope of temporality” that “extends to both the aftertaste of an experience and the subtle incipient phase of things” (ibid., p. 157). The question “How do I feel?” creates a conceptual space that allows patients to evaluate their experiences. They become cognizant of their feelings and reflect on their acceptance of *nennu* as the beauty ideal. The conceptual space distances patients from their acceptance and enables them to employ self-reflexive awareness to re-evaluate *nennu*. This awareness forms a self-reflexive feedback loop that enhances patients’ consciousness and judgment related to *nennu*. Self-reflexivity contributes to “self-regulation and the authentic self” (Sundararajan, 2015, p. 157) and connects back to the idea of *ziran*, helping patients to understand their inner and true thoughts. Yang (2015) argued that self-reflexivity is “a mode of self-making and subject formation” (p. 49). Understanding *qiyun mei* enables patients to reconsider whether they should accept *nennu* as the beauty ideal and examine their true beliefs and thoughts about beauty standards.

Through this new beauty ideal, patients can redefine beauty in terms of regular *qi* flow and health, which allows them to detach from *nennu*. Unlike the standardized features of *nennu* – fair skin, slimness, and youthfulness – regular *qi* flow and health do not adhere to a unified standard. Thus, *qiyun mei* empowers patients to redefine and reclaim agency over their own understanding and definition of beauty. During her interviews, Dr. Bai further discussed a case to illustrate how *qiyun mei's* focus on health helped her patient Lu overcome her obsession with losing weight to meet the bodily quality of slimness as promoted by *nennu*,

> When Lu came to my wards for the first time, I noted that her body figure was average–neither particularly slim nor chubby. I told her that there was no need for her to lose weight. She sought treatment for her menstruation issues, not for beautification practices. She mentioned that she had been dieting for three months, and during this time, her period had not come. Her mother, worried about her, brought her to see me. I regulated her menstrual cycle and shared my views on her dieting behaviour. I explained that being a little overweight or chubby is not unattractive, and continuing such a strict diet could negatively affect her *qi se* (气色), leading to an unhealthy yellowish complexion (*mianse weihuang* 面色萎黄). I prescribed herbal medicine and acupuncture to help regulate Lu's internal qi flow and advised her to eat healthily instead of using extreme dieting methods, which can also weaken her immune system and make her more susceptible to diseases.

The term *qi se* – which literally means skin tone – denotes the connection between the flow of *qi* and the texture of the skin. An irregular flow of *qi* results in an "unhealthy yellowish complexion"/*mianse weihuang* (面色萎黄), making *qi se* one of the standards for measuring *qiyun mei*. *Huangdi Neijing* further classifies *qi* into two types – *ying qi* (营气; roughly translated as "nutrient *qi*") and *wei qi* (卫气; roughly meaning "defensive *qi*") – to explain how their contradictory and complementary circulation supports the beauty ideal of health and *qiyun mei*.

Dr. Bai's prescription reflects her consideration of the two types of *qi* as crucial elements in finalizing Lu's beautification treatment. Given that *ying qi* functions to nourish and support, Bai advised Lu to eat healthy food to nourish her *xing* and boost her inner *qi* flow, alleviating her yellow facial tone and regulating her menstruation. On the other hand, *wei qi* protects *xing* from diseases. Hence, maintaining a healthy diet would enable Lu to extract sufficient nutrients from food and support her immune system, helping her yellow skin tone to return to a normal colour.

Additionally, Dr. Bai criticized the valorization of fair skin, equating it with paleness by using the term *mianwu xuese* (面无血色), which literally means "a pale face lacking the colour of red blood." Bai explained,

> Fair skin signifies paleness; in other words, it implies an unhealthy and weak state. *Mianwu xuese* reflects the underlying irregular circulation of *qi*, as *qi* flow is no longer able to boost blood flow, resulting in the skin appearing white without *xue se* (the colour of blood). True beauty is displayed by the good circulation of blood and the well-functioning of visceral organs, rather than merely focusing on lightening the skin. Although Lu's restrictive diet helps her achieve the ideal of fair skin, her pale appearance does not reflect good health.

Hence, similar to *mianse weihuang* (面色萎黄), *mianwu xuese* (面无血色) is also caused by irregular *qi* flow. This condition results from the blood receiving insufficient nutrition and an inability to support the overall functioning of the visceral organs. Bai elaborated,

> In the field of *zhongyi* beautification practices, the emphasis is not solely on beautifying oneself but rather on holistic adjustments that prioritize health. Health promotion involves modifying my patients' singular perception of *nennu* and mobilizing them to view themselves from a multi-dimensional perspective.

Using *qiyun mei* to emphasize the connections between health and beauty broadens the scope of beauty ideals, challenging *nennu*, which focuses only the three major characteristics of slimness, fair skin, and youthfulness. *Qiyun mei* encourages patients to prioritize health and vitality, reflected in smooth inner *qi* flow, while accepting the nuances between their *xingtai* and these three features. Thus, health and *qiyun mei* form the foundation for *zhongyi* practitioners to implement their beautification practices.

Dr. Qian cited scientific data to demonstrate the connection between thicker legs and health to address female patients' dieting behaviours and challenge the emphasis on slimness,

> According to the British Medical Journal, individuals with thick thighs and large hips tend to have a lower risk of death due to better cardiorespiratory functions and metabolism. Do not focus too much on social beauty standards; you should prioritize your health, as it accompanies you throughout your life. It is important to ensure that your *xing* remains in a positive and healthy state to support your *xin*.

Viewing thick legs as a protective mechanism for health contradicts the slimness idealized by *nennu*. Qian further promoted that maintaining health is a lifelong project requiring constant care and attention. All of these factors contribute to supporting patients in gradually distancing from *nennu* – which leads to mental and physical health

problems – and accepting the *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals, which valorize *ziran*, help to accept one's true self, and promote health.

In Teng's interviews, he connected the functioning of visceral organs with bodily appearance. He described how he prioritized health in treating visceral organs to subsequently improve appearance,

> Tear troughs, facial chloasma, or edema can signify spleen weakness. Many *sunmeixing jibing* (beauty-damaging diseases) stem from hormone dysfunction caused by excessive stress and overthinking. Stress affects cortisol levels, while overthinking weakens spleen function. These issues impact outward appearance, leading to symptoms such as tear troughs and chloasma. Some patients overlook the importance of *nei tiao* (internal attuning) and focus solely on external practices to enhance their appearance and conform to social beauty standards. As a result, internal organ weaknesses may go untreated. My goal is to address both the inner and outer aspects of *xing*, allowing normal organ function to influence outward appearance.

Dr. Teng mentioned *nei tiao* (内调), translated by Zhang (2007) as "internal attuning." *Nei tiao* treats both *xin* and *xing* by addressing patients' overall *xin-shen-xing* balance. Introducing *nei tiao* to his patients exposes them to *zhongyi* philosophy, raising their awareness of the connections between internal organ health and appearance. This enhances patients' overall awareness of their *xin-shen-xing* relationship, particularly issues related to *xin*. Teng explained,

> The issues that make people overthink are different, but when it comes to the increasing demand for beautification requests, they are similar. The beauty ideal, *nennu*, gives my female patients stress and mobilizes them to undertake possible methods to achieve that. Hence, I *tiao* (attune) their *xin* and make them less sensitive to social beauty standards by providing *zhongyi* explanations of the various symptoms of *sunmeixing jibing* manifested in their *xing*. It allows patients to comprehend the underlying mechanism behind the occurrence of different symptoms and their connections with specific organs. If I *tiao* from the inner organs, the beautification results are long-lasting as it generates another benefit – staying healthy.

Teng provided an example of *sunmeixing jibing* – such as acne – to illustrate how he attunes (*tiao*) both *xin* and *xing* simultaneously,

> Most *sunmeixing jibing* stem from imbalances in *qi*, with *qi* stagnating in the five major viscera: the heart (*xin* 心), liver (*gan* 肝), spleen (*pi* 脾), lung (*fei* 肺), and kidney (*shen* 肾). For example, acne, a type of *sunmeixing jibing*, is caused by *qi* stagnation in the stomach meridian, which can lead to hormonal imbalances by elevating testosterone levels and potentially progressing to polycystic ovary syndrome. Since hormonal imbalance is a root cause, addressing *qi* stagnation in the stomach meridian is crucial for restoring overall balance. The stomach is an emotional organ (胃是情绪器官). This indicates that stagnation in the stomach

> also reflects the affective stagnation of *xin*. Therefore, I need to treat *xin* before addressing the stagnation in the stomach that manifests as acne. In the context of beautification practices*, xin*'s stagnation usually arises from difficulties in adapting to imposed social pressures. It is essential to maintain a balanced *xintai* to cope with external influences and appreciate the diverse manifestations of beauty.

Teng's discussions highlight that *qi* stagnation (*yu*) often results from external social pressures, and his attuning approach addresses both *xin* and *xing*. His methods apply a *xin*-centered mode of care to alleviate the stress and overthinking associated with *xin*. Teng also emphasizes the importance of "appreciating the diverse manifestations of beauty," which challenges the *nennu* ideal and embraces patients' natural selves. The following section explores other beauty ideals mentioned by *zhongyi* practitioners during their interviews.

3.4. *Shenyun mei* (神韵美)/"the beauty of spiritual charm"

During Dr. Liu's interviews, he discussed two other beauty ideals named *neizai mei* (内在美; roughly translated as "inner beauty") and *zhixing mei* (知性美; roughly translated as "intellectual beauty"). In terms of *neizai mei*, Liu said,

> Beauty should not be confined solely to physical attractiveness, as it encompasses two distinct aspects: *neizai mei* (内在美)/"inner beauty" and *waizai mei* (外在美)/"outer beauty". When one's neizai mei shines brightly, it transcends physical appearance, causing people to overlook superficial bodily qualities. Traits such as elegance, decency, demeanour, and virtue are hallmarks of *neizai mei*, drawing others toward individuals with spiritual charm.

In relation to *zhixing mei*, Liu stated,

> Becoming beautiful generally involves promoting several aspects, especially the inner aspect, which is embodied through education and refinement. Cultivating oneself via studying is what we call *zhixing mei* (知性美)/"intellectual beauty". it can further manifest as *shenyun mei* from the inside out.

The two beauty ideals discussed by Liu shift the focus from bodily appearance to *xin* cultivation. *Neizai mei* emphasizes that beauty is rooted in a person's character, morals, and values rather than simply their outward appearance. *Zhixing mei* underscores the attractiveness of intelligence, wisdom, and depth of thinking. Both beauty ideals demonstrate that beauty should not be limited to outer appearance, as *neizai mei* and *zhixing mei* should also be considered standards. Yang et al. (2016) utilized *shenyun*

mei (神韵美; literally meaning “the beauty of spiritual charm”) to encompass these two types of beauty ideals.

Shenyun mei transcends physical appearance and includes elegance, charisma, and inner grace. It emphasizes the importance of cultivating one’s inner self and focuses on the moral integrity of *xin* (Yang et al., 2016). In her research on Chinese beauty ideals, *nennu* and *shunu*, Yang (2011) highlighted that Chinese culture has long closely linked beautification and spiritual charm, whereby the former is viewed as an alternative path to soul cultivation (ibid., p. 343). In *De Chong Fu*, Zhuang Zi advocates that “moral virtue can cause people to overlook physical appearance (德有所长而形有所忘).” Thus, the *xin* cultivation inherent in *shenyun mei* enables beauty to manifest as moral virtues, decent manners, and interpersonal politeness, rather than focusing solely on physical attractiveness.

3.4.1. *Xiang you xinsheng* (相由心生)/“appearance arises from the heart”

The Chinese idiom *xiang you xinsheng* (相由心生; literally “appearance arises from *xin*”) illustrates the importance of *shenyun men*. Zhou et al. (2020) argued that appearance reflects *xin*’s inner state and personal character, and thus *xiang you xinsheng* denotes the power of *xin* in shaping a person’s appearance. Dr. Bai discussed this idiom,

> *Xiang you xinsheng* implies that individuals’ outward appearances, facial expressions, and demeanours often reflect their inner emotions, thoughts, and character. It underscores the interconnectedness of our inner world – emotions, thoughts, character – with our outer appearance. *Zhongyi* believes that affective and mental states of *xin* can manifest as appearances. If an individual can effectively adjust their affective and mental states through cultivating *xin*, they can effectively change the manifestations of *xingtai*. No matter what kind of beautification practices one implements, such as acupuncture for reducing wrinkles and alleviating blemishes, the mechanism still revolves around restoring the overall balance and health of the *xin-xing* relationship by empowering *xin*. Cultivating *xin* with the aim of empowering it to resist external stimuli is demonstrated in my herbal medicine prescriptions, which focus on strengthening *qi* flow and enhancing gallbladder function. *Huangdi Neijing* promotes the idea that the gallbladder is the source of courage; treating it can boost *xin’s* courage and enable the person to appear unafraid of others’ opinions about their *xingtai*, becoming more confident. This indicates that *xin* has reached a state of peace and no longer dwells on irrelevant issues that do not contribute to its cultivation and overall health.

Bai's narratives indicate how she relied on *xiang you xinsheng* to implement her beautification practices. Since outer appearance is linked to inner *xin*, treating *xin* shapes a person's appearance. During her interviews, Bai provided an example to demonstrate how she applied this concept,

> I treated a girl named Su who was constantly worried that her boyfriend would leave her. Her worries and anxiety manifested as a fear of losing her hair, which kept her up at night. She mentioned that if her hair continued to fall out, it would eventually lead to her boyfriend breaking up with her. Upon checking her hair condition, I found it to be healthy. I believe that hair loss is not the main issue here; there are other contributing factors. Furthermore, she did not actually have a hair loss problem. The fear, anxiety, and worries affecting her *xin* are the primary reasons her boyfriend might consider leaving her. I addressed her negative affects by using herbal medicine to boost the *qi* flow of her gallbladder, giving her *xin* energy to make her appear more confident.

In his interviews, Dr. Liu provided an overview of his opinions regarding *xiang you xinsheng* and *xintai* to support *shenyun mei*,

> When facing pressure from external comments about your *xingtai*, what can you do? Firstly, you need to transform that pressure by attuning your *xintai*. The primary factor driving most of my patients to seek beautification practices is a lack of self-confidence, and they are often motivated by others' advice. As I have emphasized, beauty does not account solely for physical appearance; *neizai mei*, *zhixing mei*, and *shenyun mei* are also important. Conversing with people possessing *shenyun mei* makes you feel comfortable, leading to a desire for further interaction. Such attractiveness does not stem from their *xingtai* but from their *xin*. Their *neizai mei* and *zhixing mei* sustain their *shenyun mei* and enable them to deal with the world peacefully and tolerantly with a balanced *xintai*. Hence, people show a willingness to gravitate toward them, which in turn boosts their confidence in handling external stimuli and comments.

Liu's narrative demonstrates the importance of the three types of beauty ideals in *xin* cultivation, given that they target the moral and intellectual aspects of *xin*. They motivate *xin* to adopt a constant learning role, recognize its limitations, and remain humble. Through this process, *xin* continually promotes itself to better adapt to its social surroundings, improving its moral standards and cognitive consciousness. Hence, the main focus of *zhongyi* beautification practices lies in cultivating *xin* and attuning *xintai*, engaging in continuous inward improvement. This shifts the focus from conforming to social standards to prioritizing self-development and self-empowerment.

Chapter 4.

Conclusion

4.1. Summary of Findings

This thesis challenges the mainstream beauty ideal of *nennu* – which emphasizes fair skin, youthfulness, and slimness – by investigating how *zhongyi* practitioners apply the *xin*-centered mode of care and introduce *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals to alleviate the considerable mental and physical health problems experienced by young urban women in China. For this purpose, this thesis seeks to gain answers to three overarching research questions: How do *zhongyi* practitioners apply *zhongyi* psychology techniques to their beautification practices to assist their patients in navigating external social stressors influencing their hearts (*xin*) and bodies (*xing*)? How do *zhongyi* practitioners view the increasing demand for beautification practices, and what suggestions, practices, and therapies can they offer to satisfy this demand? How does the beauty ideal promoted by *zhongyi* cosmetology challenge the current valorization of fair skin, youthfulness, and slimness represented by nennu? In this final chapter, I will review the key findings from this research.

After synthesizing and analyzing all of the data, I found that *zhongyi* practitioners target their patients' *xin* to form affective bonds under the influence of *zhongyi* psychology's *xin*-centered mode of care, thereby attracting patients to try *zhongyi* beautification practices. Since such practices have not been industrialized to the same extent as their Western counterparts, practitioners rely on the affect and will of *xin* to solidify patients' decisions to receive *zhongyi* cosmetology. I also found that the type of hospitals and the practitioners' gender influence the mode and pace of *xin*-bonding. "District hospitals"/*qushu yiyuan* (区属医院) create a strong affective connection between practitioners and patients due to their smaller size and fewer categorizations of diseases than "grade-A tertiary hospitals"/*sanjia yiyuan* (三甲医院). Moreover, female practitioners are more affectively connected to female patients, which makes such practitioners more emotionally exploitable than their male counterparts.

Additionally, such a *xin*-involved connection enables patients to listen sincerely to the practitioners' suggestions. This further reconciles patients' *xinbing* (心病)/"heartache" created by external social pressure. In this sense, *zhongyi* practitioners engage in affective labour to produce a sense of connectedness and a feeling of relaxation among their patients. However, beyond the affective outcomes produced by *xin*-bonding, I found that *zhongyi* practitioners also play a role in holistic labour. They examine their patients' social environments and personal networks, identify the underlying causes of beautification requests, attempt to address these causes, and work to prevent relapse. *Zhongyi* practitioners balance their patients' *xin* in relation to their social environments and cultivate the adaptability and creativity of *xin*. This helps patients' *xin* to better deal with similar situations that they might face in the future. Hence, treating *xin* prevents *xinbing* from relapsing.

Preventing relapse is a future-centric way of thinking, and in *zhongyi*, it is known as *zhiweibing* (治未病), roughly translated as "preventing disease before it occurs." *Zhongyi* practitioners believe in the power of *xin'*s will/*zhi* (志) to direct the outcome's trajectory. Hence, they emphasize the importance of *xintai* (心态)/"heat attitude" and introduce the concepts of *biantong* (变通)/"change with continuity" and *faxi* (发心)/"the orientation of *xin*" to highlight the agentive role of *xin*. Since *xin* directs actions, *zhongyi* practitioners treat *xin* to balance how their patients interact with the outer world. I found that *zhongyi* practitioners adopt two approaches to address issues related to *xin*, embodied as a top-down direction named *zou xin* (走心)/"passing through the heart/*xin*" and a bottom-up method called *zou shen* (走肾)/"passing through the kidney". Both approaches empower *xin* and harmonize the overall *xin-shen-xing* relationship, while viewing affect as a bridge connecting *xin* and *xing* through the movement of *qi*. *Zou xin* focuses on transforming patients' *xintai* by offering sincere suggestions, while *zou shen* employs traditional practices such as acupuncture, moxibustion, and herbal medicine to alleviate mental and physiological *yu* (瘀)/"stagnation".

Xin is expected to possess the characteristics of water, allowing it to better adapt to the social world. These characteristics enable *xin* to adjust its *tai* (态)/"attitude" in response to its surrounding environments. *Zhongyi* practitioners introduce the concepts of *wu*(无)/"complete emptiness" and *wuwei* (无为)/"complete emptiness of actions" from

Huangdi Neijing and Daoism to help *xin* to distinguish between the social pressure imposed and its naturally formulated ideas. *Wu* and *wuwei* highlight *ziran* and the "stillness"/*jing* (静) of *xin*, as crucial elements for *xin* to balance itself in relation to its surrounding environment.

Zhongyi practitioners propose alternative beauty ideals to address the negative impact of *nennu* on mental and physical health. *Ziran mei* (自然美) – roughly translated as "natural beauty" – advocates for the originality and naturalness of *xing*. It promotes diversity and uniqueness, which cultivate *xin's* individuality and independence. *Qiyun mei* (气韵美) – roughly translated as "the beauty of vitality" – draws a connection between beauty and health, highlighting the importance of regular inner *qi* flow as a beauty standard. *Shenyun mei* (神韵美) – roughly translated as "the beauty of spiritual charm" – directs attention from outer appearance to inner *xin* cultivation. *Neizai mei* (内在美) – literally "inner beauty" – emphasizes that true beauty stems from an individual's character, values, and moral qualities. *Zhixing mei* (知性美) – literally "intellectual beauty" – underscores the attractiveness of intelligence, wisdom, and depth of thinking. These *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals illustrate the connection between beautification and *xin* cultivation, providing new insights into beauty standards, enabling patients to reconsider and redefine beauty in terms of health and spiritual charm. Thus, patients regain their agency and become alienated from *nennu*, which can create mental and physical health issues.

4.2. Limitations of this research and future focus

Due to temporal and spatial limitations as well as the impact of COVID-19, my research was solely conducted in Shenyang. Consequently, given that I was unable to interview *zhongyi* practitioners from other areas, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population. Furthermore, the examples provided in the case studies during my interviews predominantly focus on the beautification requests of young urban women. As a result, this study lacks an analysis from the viewpoints of male patients. Future research could explore the perspectives of male patients to study their views on male beauty ideals. Adopting a comparative approach would help to understand the differences and similarities between male and female behaviours in seeking beautification practices and the underlying socio-cultural reasons for these actions.

Additionally, the ethnographic analysis of *xin-shen-xing* in this thesis is based on the perspectives of *zhongyi* practitioners. Future research could complement and enhance the study from a different perspective by investigating patients' thoughts on *zhongyi*-proposed beauty ideals, how they process practitioners' suggestions, and how they integrate these suggestions into their daily lives.

Finally, social beauty ideals undergo continuous shifts over time, influenced by various feminist social movements and changes in the social environment. It is important to pay attention to these evolving beauty standards, as they signify the evolution and alteration of beauty ideals. These changes can influence the specific body parts individuals seek to enhance through *zhongyi* cosmetology and the mental issues that *zhongyi* psychology should address. Due to its temporal and spatial limitations, this study does not comprise any comparative or longitudinal data for future projection or analysis. Therefore, research on *zhongyi* cosmetology and psychology should receive more attention and frequent updates to align with ongoing changes in beauty ideals. Overall, the insights gained through this study provide practical recommendations for future research on *zhongyi* cosmetology, *zhongyi* psychology, *xin-shen-xing* relationships, and the holistic labour performed by *zhongyi* practitioners.

4.3. Research contributions

Current studies on mental and physical health issues primarily analyze four aspects: the social milieu promoting physical attractiveness as an additional stratified factor, the negative influences of social media in publicizing *nennu*, the use of self-entrepreneurship to legitimize beautification practices, and the various affects driving people to pursue *nennu*. My research on *zhongyi* cosmetology and the *xin*-centered mode of care in *zhongyi* psychology has aimed to address and fill the knowledge gaps arising from the over-emphasis on external social forces by considering the agentive role of *xin* and exploring how *zhongyi* concepts – *xin*, *shen*, and *xing* – are applied in traditional beautification practices. Additionally, I have investigated how *zhongyi* practitioners perform holistic labour to help their patients to better adapt to the social world.

Zhongyi-proposed beauty ideals differ from *nennu*. Receiving *zhongyi* beautification practices entails a redefinition of social beauty ideals by prioritizing health

and reshaping how *xin* perceives external social stimuli. The consideration of *xin* in *zhongyi* beautification practices aims to examine the dynamic connections that a person can establish with their surroundings. Given that *zhongyi* practitioners play the role of holistic labour to transform their patients' *xin*, *zhongyi* cosmetology extends beyond solely focusing on beautifying people, harmonizing their overall *xin-shen-xing* relationship and balancing their *xin* in relation to their surroundings. Moreover, I provide timely and current data to analyze the impact of the social beauty ideal of *nennu* on young urban women's mental and physical health. This study underscores the contributions of *zhongyi* to beautification and wellness, while illustrating how *zhongyi* practitioners perform holistic labour to reconcile their patients' *xin-shen-xing* imbalance, thereby improving patients' mental and physical health.

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