



Ying Jin,  
*Doctor–Patient Communication  
in Chinese and Western Medicine*

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by Alessandro Vallati

The coexistence of a significant variety of cultures shaping today's global social landscape engenders a complex and varied multicultural societal scenery, comprising individuals whose communication is often hampered by linguistic disparities and diverging cultural norms. This transcultural perspective profoundly impacts the healing journey of patients originating from foreign backgrounds, as each culture develops a unique understanding of health, suffering, illness, treatment, and death, drawing upon internally cultivated capacities, experiences, and individual resources within distinct cultural frameworks.

Over the years, scholars in the fields of linguistics, psychology and sociology have consistently acknowledged the pivotal role played by doctor-patient communication and intercultural competence in achieving therapeutic efficacy and nurturing interpersonal relationships. According to this perspective, the attainment of therapeutic outcomes is intimately linked to the quality of social and communicative interactions with healthcare practitioners. Thus, the enhancement of specialist-patient communication necessitates the cultivation of empathy, attentiveness to individual patient traits, and thoughtful consideration of cultural nuances, thereby emphasizing the profound significance of cultural factors.



Building upon these premises, the research monograph authored by Jin Ying, Ph.D. from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, delves into the investigation of the parallels and discrepancies in doctor-older patient communication and patient satisfaction between traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) (*Zhongyi* 中医) and Western medicine (WM) (*Xiyi* 西医) practiced in China. Drawing upon data collected from 69 real-life medical consultations, including 30 from TCM and 39 from WM, the author employs Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The insights elucidated in the volume shed light on the intricate interplay between clinical variations, health communication, and patient outcomes. Most importantly, Jin's monograph fosters a thorough comprehension of the cultural archetypes underpinning the Chinese patients' approach to both traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Western medicine (WM), and examines how the integration of these influences doctor-patient communication, thereby impacting the trajectory and therapeutic results for patients of Chinese origin.

Included in the *Routledge Studies in Language, Health and Culture* series, the volume consists of a total of 8 chapters. Chapter 1 provides an expository survey of the key philosophical theories interrelated to the Taoist doctrine which serves as the cornerstone of TCM. The exposition is complemented by a historical and political examination of the integration of WM and the dualistic relationship that entails a close integration of conventional and Chinese medical practices within China's healthcare system. Chapter 2 foregrounds the theoretical and methodological approaches and the standardized transcription conventions employed in the study, encompassing process/interaction, conversation, and frame analysis. These methodologies enable Jin to position the following research analysis within the realms of health communication and applied linguistics. In Chapter 3, Jin employs Roter Interaction System Analysis to quantify and compare verbal communication behaviors between doctors and older patients in TCM and WM encounters examining four types of communication: question-asking, information-giving, relationship-building, and partnership-building. The analysis distinguishes between instrumental and socio-emotional communication, as well as between biomedical and psychosocial aspects. Consequently, the author proceeds to discuss the differences between TCM and WM encounters by calculating three scores: the biomedical/psychosocial ratio, the doctor's verbal dominance, and the patient-centeredness score. Chapter 4 explores patients' assessments of doctors' communication effectiveness within six relational communication domains: immediacy, similarity, receptivity, composure, formality, and dominance. Expanding findings collected in previous chapters, Chapters 5-7 use a bottom-up approach to conduct a CA-driven study in order to examine the sequential environments and functions of three activities: the interactional organization of diagnostic test recommendation in WM encounters, lifestyle advice-giving and reception in TCM encounters, and nonmedical small talk in both TCM and WM. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the volume by revisiting the research objectives and design, summarizing key findings, and discussing implications and future directions for both communication scholars and healthcare practitioners.



Overall, Jin Ying's monograph represents a noteworthy advancement in the fields of healthcare communication and medical linguistics research. By synthesizing three methodologically distinct research endeavors, Jin lays the theoretical and methodological foundations for future studies on the cultural and relational features of communication between healthcare practitioners and Sinophone patients within the broader framework of CA. Whereas it would be highly commendable to enhance the book by incorporating further insights into the philosophical, cultural, and diagnostic dimensions of TCM, thereby broadening its readership, it is important to acknowledge that the volume already excels in its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates linguistic, cultural, communicative and healthcare elements. This approach is particularly effective in addressing increasingly complex intercultural phenomena that permeate professional environments and engage diverse personnel. In its entirety, the monograph appears well-suited to effectively addressing the needs of scholars, students, and medical professionals who are engaged in the study of doctor-patient interactions and intercultural communication. By offering valuable methodologies and procedures, the volume facilitates comprehensive investigations into the communication patterns of Sinophone patients, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of these dynamics within healthcare settings. Furthermore, its focus on the interrelation between language and culture holds significant didactic implications extending to the training of healthcare professionals and linguistic and cultural mediators in multicultural settings. Jin's approach fosters a transdisciplinary dialogue encouraging future research works aiming at bridging linguistic and cultural inquiry with professional healthcare practice.

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*I raccomandati/Los recomendados/Les recommandés/Highly recommended*

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