

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine
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Convergence and Collisions: Disease, Religion, and Healing in Asia

Wong Tai Sin: Images of the Divine and Healing in Hong Kong

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The goals of this quantitative and qualitative study were to extend the knowledge concerning ethnomedicine and the psychology of religion. 165 patients were interviewed using a structured questionnaire to examine perceived differences between traditional Chinese and western styles of medical treatment. We found evidence supporting the claim that believers of Wong Tai Sin tended to put more faith in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) than non-believers. Further, those patients who expressed positive affect when shown a picture of Wong Tai Sin showed a greater degree of confidence in their expected cure and reported fewer side effects than those who did not experience any particular feeling when presented the photograph. Requests most often made of Wong Tai Sin by worshippers interviewed fell into five categories: Health (41.2%); safety (30.3%); career (4.2%); children's/grandchildren's school work (4.2%); wealth (3%). By ascertaining the degree to which participants perceived they were more likely to be healed with TCM and whether they were believers in Wong Tai Sin, we showed that mental imagery of and belief in the deity function in parallel to the perceived healing process.