

# CHAPTER 7

## THE USE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE BY THE MIDDLE – CLASS BANGKOKIANS (1993 – 1997)

This is the last chapter on the thesis “The Use of Traditional Medicine by the Middle – Class Bangkokians (1993 – 1997)”. Analyzing the situations concerning the use of traditional medicine was one of the objectives.

The hypothesis at Chapter 1 may be recalled as the following:

“The popularity and the increase in the use of traditional medicine from the year 1993 till now have been the result of a new wave in health seeking behaviour among the Middle – Class Bangkokians due to the paradigm shift in health care and treatment. The

paradigm shift here concerns with the situation where the Middle – Class Bangkokians prefer an ordinary course of nature in nutrition and health care and develop some uncertainty towards modern medicine.”

Before going into the popularity increase as in the hypothesis, it is perhaps needed to look at the hypothesis on the increase in the use of traditional medicine. There could be more researches in the future what it means by the use of medicine. But by for now, I would assume that the increase in the use for the increase in the number of pharmacies that use (=prescribe) traditional medicine. Was there really any increase in Bangkok's pharmacies selling more traditional medicine?

“The distribution of pharmacies by category and region (1988 – 1996) ” on the next page at [Table 7.1](#) shows that traditional medicine is more supplied to the people in Bangkok than those in other areas of Thailand (MOPH, [Health in Thailand 1995-1996](#), 1997: 122). The ratio of traditional medicine pharmacies has been constantly less in Bangkok than those in other provincial areas throughout the “1988 to 1996” period, which means that traditional medicine is easier to obtain in Bangkok than in other areas of Thailand. Going through other ratios also indicate that health care resources that include traditional medicine as well as modern medicine are more readily supplied and available in Bangkok than any other parts of Thailand.

Distribution of Pharmacies by Category and Region, 1988-1996.

Category of pharmacies	No. of pharmacies and population ratio								
	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
1. Modern pharmacies									
Bangkok	1,937 (1:3,157)	1,917 (1:3,263)	1,963 (1:3,258)	2,123 (1:2,952)	2,194 (1:2,548)	2,135 (1:2,608)	2,176 (1:2,564)	2,249 (1:2,480)	2,262 (1:2,466)
Provincial areas	1,615 (1:29,982)	1,616 (1:30,441)	1,743 (1:28,223)	1,743 (1:29,062)	1,743 (1:29,709)	2,336 (1:22,474)	2,363 (1:22,487)	2,500 (1:21,480)	2,461 (1:21,821)
Total nationwide	3,552 (1:15,354)	3,533 (1:15,694)	3,706 (1:15,207)	3,866 (1:17,271)	3,937 (1:16,573)	4,471 (1:12,986)	4,539 (1:12,936)	4,749 (1:12,621)	4,723 (1:12,551)
2. Pharmacies selling readily-packaged drugs									
Bangkok	759 (1:8,057)	747 (1:8,375)	926 (1:6,907)	925 (1:6,775)	844 (1:6,625)	793 (1:7,021)	748 (1:7,458)	748 (1:7,457)	710 (1:7,856)
Provincial areas	4,603 (1:10,519)	4,604 (1:10,685)	4,644 (1:10,754)	4,644 (1:10,998)	4,644 (1:11,151)	4,548 (1:11,542)	4,442 (1:11,962)	4,484 (1:11,976)	4,437 (1:12,103)
Total nationwide	5,362 (1:10,171)	5,351 (1:10,362)	5,570 (1:10,115)	5,569 (1:10,175)	5,488 (1:10,455)	5,341 (1:10,871)	5,190 (1:11,313)	5,232 (1:11,330)	5,147 (1:11,517)
3. Traditional pharmacies									
Bangkok	1,749 (1:3,496)	1,918 (1:3,262)	535 (1:11,955)	479 (1:11,666)	459 (1:12,182)	436 (1:12,769)	432 (1:12,913)	413 (1:13,505)	395 (1:14,120)
Provincial areas	4,865 (1:9,953)	1,999 (1:24,608)	1,999 (1:24,984)	1,999 (1:25,550)	1,999 (1:25,905)	1,916 (1:27,398)	1,900 (1:27,967)	1,854 (1:28,965)	1,854 (1:28,965)
Total nationwide	6,614 (1:8,246)	3,917 (1:14,176)	2,534 (1:22,234)	2,478 (1:22,866)	2,458 (1:23,342)	2,352 (1:24,686)	2,332 (1:25,118)	2,267 (1:26,148)	2,249 (1:26,357)
All categories									
Bangkok	4,445 (1:1,375)	4,582 (1:1,365)	3,424 (1:1,867)	3,527 (1:1,584)	3,497 (1:1,598)	3,364 (1:1,654)	3,356 (1:1,662)	3,410 (1:1,635)	3,367 (1:1,656)
Provincial areas	11,083 (1:4,368)	8,219 (1:5,985)	8,386 (1:5,955)	8,386 (1:6,090)	8,386 (1:6,175)	8,800 (1:5,965)	8,705 (1:6,104)	8,838 (1:6,076)	8,752 (1:6,135)

Source: The Food and Drug Administration, MoPH.

Note: 1. The figure in parentheses are pharmacy-population ratios.

2. Calculations are based on population statistics from the Registration Bureau, Ministry of Interior, 1995.

But the issue could be different as on the trend of the number of traditional medicine pharmacies in Thailand. In fact on the previous list of "the distribution of pharmacies by category and region (1988 – 1996)", there is only one type of pharmacies which has seen the constant decline from the figures released from the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand. That only decline in number is in the category of "Traditional (medicine) pharmacies" in Thailand.

There are various reasons for the fall-out of the number of traditional medicine pharmacies in Bangkok even after the year 1993 when the National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine was established to offer the official status of health care and treatment. As for the number, it declined from 1749 in 1988 to 395 in 1996. One of such reasons is already noted in the factors associated with the "non – use" of traditional medicine, which was on the generation gap of the old and of the young at pharmacies and the young refused to accept the traditional medicine and therefore refused to use (=prescribe) traditional medicine. But what I consider more profound is that there are new regulations on traditional medicine set by the FDA and by the NITTM at the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand especially since 1993 that examine the traditional medicine suppliers, providers and producers. Those health care providers that fail to meet the standards set by the MOPH are difficult to operate without the license, unlike formally such guidelines and regulations were less strictly enforced or non – existence.

The tougher regulations on traditional medicine could be one of the main factors that saw the traditional medicine pharmacies in Bangkok as well as in other province decline while modern pharmacists were on the increase in Thailand in the same year period of 1988 to 1996. From the number of traditional medicine pharmacies, it was difficult to support the earlier set hypothesis on the increase in the use of traditional medicine in the given year period. How about the increase in the popularity of traditional medicine in Thai society, especially among the Middle – Class Bangkokians?

The definitions of what traditional medicine could be were the main focus on interview analysis. It has been noted that the herbal list prepared by the National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine for the possible primary health care is instructive as the Institute has carefully chosen plants that are easily available yet effective in daily life. This could be in sharp contrast from traditional medicine as “boutique” medicine where various scholars often relate such a use of traditional medicine as a sign and an emergence of the “Middle –Class – ness” in Thai society. There seems some problem for this reasoning as relating such a use of traditional medicine may perhaps describe the phenomena without identifying ‘who’ the Middle – Class Bangkokians are. There is a

separate chapter allocated on this thesis, identifying who the "Middle – Class Bangkokians" are as the main target for the "use" and "non-use" of traditional medicine in Thai society.

For the previous reasoning of what it means by traditional medicine, the traditional medicine could be "old" in a sense that many plants listed there have long and often been found everywhere in Thailand and are often taken for granted as vegetables and fruits. But the concept is "new" because many "old" vegetables and fruits found easily and everywhere for a long period of time would in fact be "traditional medicine", as the list from the NITTM suggests.

Throughout this thesis there have been more emphasis on traditional medicine 'proper'. It is often dismissed as 'non-traditional medicine' but the popularity and the increase of traditional medicine would be much greater if various modern health care and treatment products are categorized as traditional medicine where there are "mixes" with various plants and ingredients considered "healthy" and "natural". Though this is often dismissed as "modern pharmaceutical products/ toiletries" and "modern medicine", more interests should be circulated for those interested in this field apart from my approach of taking traditional medicine 'proper'. As for the increase in the popularity of traditional medicine, the hypothesis is more substantiated.

It is important to mention that the use of traditional medicine has now been revived with the full official backing from the National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine (NITTM) and the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand. The year 1993 is the year of the changing paradigm in the fields of Thai traditional medicine in terms of the "increase in the popularity" of traditional medicine, which had been officially 'abandoned' as noted at the third chapter. But the significance is perhaps more towards the "re-recognition" of traditional medicine from the state health authority rather than the genuine "use" of traditional medicine in Bangkok as well as in Thai society. From the number of traditional medicine pharmacies given earlier, the 'use' of traditional medicine was still not fully found even after the year 1993 with the establishment of NITTM together with the full re-recognition of traditional medicine. This is true especially when it is difficult to include modern pharmaceutical products using the mix of what is considered 'natural' and 'traditional' as non-traditional medicine proper. The decline of the number associated with the falling number of traditional medicine pharmacies was considered due to the various re-regulations and law surrounding the 'use' of traditional medicine for quality standardization. The significance of establishing the NITTM is still valid but further observations are required for any 'genuine' demands and needs of traditional medicine from the Middle – Class Bangkokians.

Although this thesis was on the main time frame of 1993 to 1997, but it is easier now to note why traditional medicine was virtually discontinued in use in Thai society almost 100 years ago. One reason that was not listed could be that there had been too much focus on the "use" and even "non-use" of medicine, being modern or traditional. There could be a mismatch and a gap between what is needed at the clients' side and those who are licensed to practice medicine even now. But such a gap and a mismatch could have been greater in the past where studies on the possible "needs" of traditional medicine in Thai society were perhaps as needed as the laboratory research of traditional medicine itself.

In other words, the situation surrounding traditional medicine may not be too different from one hundred years ago if there are fewer studies on the possible "needs" of traditional medicine. Medicine is obviously necessary but may not be able to exist too long when there are no ones need it. Focusing too much on the "use" as an occupation of "prescription" of medicine may not be able to identify what medicine is needed in Thai society. Note that a condition of "good health" may not perhaps start with any medicine, be it modern or traditional, and staying "healthy" and the use or even the "non-use" of traditional medicine are not quite synonymous at all times. The new development on traditional medicine has only just begun, with the possible increase and the official



Re-recognition of the Thai traditional medicine. In order to promote traditional medicine in Thai society, there should be studies on the needs of traditional medicine rather than the cases of using traditional medicine. Needed medicine will still be used, without strong promotions to boost the "use" of medicine because such medicine is "needed", be it modern or traditional. Perhaps it is necessary to re-emphasise the title of my thesis in the context from "The Use of Traditional Medicine by the Middle – Class Bangkokians (1993-1997)" to "The Needs of Traditional Medicine for the Middle – Class Bangkokians (1993-1997)".