

Abstract

“Foot Reflexology”: Alternative Health/Alternative Occupation is the study of the “foot” and the people whose livelihood depends on it. Officially recognized as one of the alternative cares for the healthy body, foot massage becomes one of the most lucrative businesses in Thailand. As a result of it, a great number of people, most of whom are the underprivileged, become practitioners of foot massage.

Being the lowest part of the body, the foot is regarded by many cultures as lowly, even unclean. Reflexology, one of the methods of foot massage, however, postulates that the foot is but the human body in miniature. Moreover, the health of the body is closely related to the conditions of the foot. Thus, healthy foot, according to this perspective, signifies healthy body and *vice versa*. Nowadays, when being healthy is highly valued, the status of this lowly part of the body is also elevated.

“Foot Reflexology”: Alternative Health/Alternative Occupation examines the place of the foot in various cultural contexts. Then, it presents the knowledge and techniques used by practitioners of foot massage in central Bangkok, Thailand. *“Foot Reflexology”: Alternative Health/Alternative Occupation* proposes that the health consciousness, both on the part of the Thai state and its population, plays an important role in making foot massage popular. This consciousness also elevates the cultural status of the foot as well as the practitioners of foot massage. More importantly, as much as foot massage has become one of the cheapest, thus most accessible alternative health cares for the people in Thai society, being practitioners of foot massage has become an alternative occupation for the underprivileged or the stigmatized.