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The challenge of professional identity for Chinese clinicians in the process of learning and practicing psychoanalytic psychotherapy: The discussion on the frame of Chinese culture[1]

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One important element in psychoanalysis, which is derived from Western culture, is individualization: the independency and autonomy of an individual are highly valued. However, one of the significant essences in Chinese culture is that the collective interests transcend the individual interests and the interests of social groups are more important than those of families. Therefore, when learning and practicing psychoanalytic psychotherapy, Chinese clinicians inevitably experience conflicts derived from this difference of cultural values. This article attempts to use a historical perspective to discuss the current challenges of professional identity for Chinese clinicians learning and practicing psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, professional identity, Western and Chinese culture

As a discipline, psychoanalysis belongs to no one, to no state, to no country, to no institution. And while professional societies appear to wish to represent it exclusively, for the most part it overflows from the framework that attempts to constrain it. In a way, psychoanalysis belongs to humankind's legacy, as in fact do other disciplines born at the same time, such as sociology or anthropology.

Introduction

Erikson introduced the concept of identity into the field of psychoanalysis to explore the phenomenon of psychopathology. In one of his papers, Otto F. Kernberg (2006, p. 2) summarizes Erikson's ideas of identity:

> He described identity as an overall synthesis of ego functions, on the one hand, and as the consolidation of a sense of solidarity with group ideals and group identity, on the other. Erikson stressed that ego identity has both conscious and unconscious aspects, and that it develops gradually, until a final consolidation of its structure occurs in adolescence. He stressing the importance of the conscious sense of individual identity, matched by unconscious strivings for continuity of the individual's self experience.
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> (p.)

[1]Translated by Jun Gao.

Helmut Thomä (2004) discusses the topic of professional identity of psychoanalysts in one of his papers. He argues that, for psychoanalysts, their professional feelings, thoughts and behaviors are all closely related to their personal identities. He borrows an idea from R. Shafter's work *Analytical Attitude* which conceptualizes the professional identity of psychoanalysts as 'the professional second self', and proposes that every psychoanalyst needs to work through double identities: on the one hand, an analyst need to connect one's personal self to the professional organizations; on the other hand, he/she may encounter the conflicts between the personal and professional self.

Although the professional second self is closely related to personal identity, the psychoanalytical training and education are more important for the construction and development of this second self. Helmut Thomä conveys a similar idea in his paper, saying that all psychoanalytical institutes and training organizations face the same challenge, that is, how to help trainees to form their professional identities, and to separate from or work together with their own personal identities.

In China, the first Sino-German Continuous Training Program for Psychotherapists began in 1997. Since then, along with the development of the Chinese economy and the intense cultural exchange with Western countries, more and more Chinese colleagues are involved in these kinds of projects. They learn psychoanalytical psychotherapy and psychoanalysis with semplice wishes. At the beginning, most of them only wanted to learn and master the clinical technique of psychotherapy, so as to help those who were suffering from mental disorders and other clients in a more efficient way. They also hoped that, through learning, they could improve their professional capabilities and obtain a proper status in their organizations and the society in general. Along with these simple wishes they also had fantasies about psychoanalysis derived from Western cultures. Some old but still vital concepts in psychoanalytical theories such as Freud, the unconscious, interpretation of dreams, id, ego and superego, inducted Chinese colleagues into the path of learning and practicing psychoanalytical psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, with the help of Western psychoanalysts, who were like messengers, traveling thousands of miles to teach psychoanalytical psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in China.

In contrast to the 100 year history of International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), the history of training and education of psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy in general, in China is only 13 years old, that is, it is still in its adolescence stage. Learners and practitioners of different ages (including those who were born in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) and from different parts of China used clumsy English to communicate and interact with Western teachers. In this process, they improved their professional competence but at the same time they also experienced some conflicts resulting from cultural differences.

For Chinese learners and practitioners, being aware of the challenge of professional identity is crucial to our own professional development. This awareness will help us to take psychoanalytical theories and techniques not only as a mechanical tool, but also a means of deepening the understanding

of life, human nature and the psychic world. It also helps us to integrate the working attitudes of psychoanalytical psychotherapy with our original professional identities. All these make it possible for psychoanalysis to be blended into the field of mental health in China as a complete discipline, as well as into Chinese society. This interaction and integration will lead to the creation and the development of a local training and education model suitable for Chinese culture.

In this article, I will address the topic from two perspectives, one is historical and the other, contemporary.

Chinese intellectuals differ from Western intellectuals in the cultural features of personal identity and professional identity

'Intellectuals' refers to a group of people who take the responsibility of spreading knowledge and improving knowledge, and are able to expatiate on social values and ideas (Zizhong Zhang, 2003). According to this definition, we can include the majority of Chinese learners and practitioners of psychoanalytical psychotherapy in the group of Chinese intellectuals. Chinese intellectuals have a different development of personal identity and professional second self compared with Western intellectuals, and this difference is mainly caused by the different social patterns.

Social patterns are the organizational systems of social constitution and form the basis of social order. The biggest difference between Chinese social patterns and Western social patterns is the basic unit of social constitution. Chinese scholar Wei Pan (2009) ponders on this topic:

> In Western countries, individuals are the basic units of a society. The idea of 'contract' between individuals and groups, between individuals and a nation, between individuals and God, is very popular. In China, families are the basic units of the society, whereas ethical standards based on the family responsibility permeate into the social system and administrative management.
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> (Pan, 2009, p. 66)

Although families are regarded as the basic unit of society in many places around the world, in China, family has a different connotation from in Western societies.[2]

The personal identity of intellectuals (scholar-bureaucrats) in traditional Chinese society is based on three dimensions, that is, the social identification of a family (ancestors), the political identification of a state (emperor) and the cultural identification of Confucianism (Confucius). A family is an essential place for traditional Chinese intellectuals to live a decent life and to serve one's obligations properly (Yang, 2006). Chinese family ethics

[2]In Western history civil society that was formed by yeomanry was a very important component for constituting social patterns. The communities that formed a civil society had very important social functions. It represented the interests of a certain social group or social class. However, in Chinese history, 'society' has never been an aggregation of civil communities. Traditionally, it was formed by independent, free, self-supplying and equal families of famers. The enlargement of families became clans and villages. Chinese society was formed by families of "hundreds of family names", and later they developed into working units and communities in modern cities (Pan, 2009, pp. 59–81).

(being a benign father and being a son who serves one's filial piety) is the spiritual bonding of the Chinese society. Mr. Shumin Liang once addressed this topic in a very incisive way by saying that: "The ethical relationship is a relationship based on obligations. A person seems not to live for his own, but to live for others" (p. 81). He also cited the work of Mr. Dongsun Zhang to support his idea:

> In Chinese thinking, all the traditional attitudes disavow the independency of an individual but regard an individual as a "dependent being". It didn't mean that his survival must rely on others. It meant when living in the world, one had to fulfill one's obligation and in this regard, he was born for this obligation.
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> (Liang, 1949, p. 81)

Alan Roland, a North American psychoanalyst, summarized three characteristics of relationships among Asians, based on his experience of doing analyses for Asians and his own observations.

The first characteristic is a reciprocal relationship between the old and the young, the superior and the subordinate. Those who are younger or less experienced should respect, be loyal to and obey those who are older or hold a senior position. Those who are older or hold a senior position should take the responsibility of caring and nurturing those who are younger or less experienced, and the former also has the obligation of giving advice and guidance to the latter. In this relationship, the essence is the evaluation from others. He described exactly the essentials of 'The Three Cardinal Rules and Five Constant Virtues' in traditional Chinese society. 'The Three Cardinal Rules' mean that the minister, the son and the wife should obey the emperor, the father and the husband, whereas the emperor, the father and the husband should be a model for the minister, the son and the wife. 'The Five Constant Virtues' refer to benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. These are the ethical codes for relationships between the emperor and the minister, the father and the son, the husband and wife, and among brothers and friends.

The second characteristic is that, in this hierarchical relationship, there is a tension between being dependent and being independent, an emotional entanglement and sometimes a way of nonverbal communication that is seen as extraordinary by those in the West.

The third characteristic is that, for those who have superior virtues, no matter what status he/she has in family or society (such as a housewife), he/she will be idealized and respected. This high status is the result of personal virtues (Roland, 2010).

The ideas mentioned above are shared by Chinese scholars and Western analysts in terms of the personal and professional identity of Chinese and other Asians, that is, the evaluation and recognition in family and among family members are basic blocks underlying the development of personal identity, as well as professional identity.

After the Opium War in 1840 and before the founding of new China in 1949, the intrusion of foreign capital and growth of domestic capital facilitated the birth of modern cities. The 4 May movement in 1919, that advocated the freedom of individuals and opposed the familial system, hit

traditional Chinese family notions in such a dramatic way that seriously weakened its power. However, while modern Chinese intellectuals gained certain personal liberation and freedom, they also experienced a crisis of survival and of personal social identity caused by lacking a sense of social belonging.

After 1949 (and until the implementation of the open-up policy in 1980), under the influence of a socialistic system, the function of family and clan in forming the personal identity was further weakened in China, and the so-called 'working unit', as a replacement or a medium, took that function of family and clan. The social identity of Chinese intellectuals was closely related to their 'working unit'. It is very difficult to find an appropriate translation in English for 'working unit' [Dan Wei] in Chinese, since 'working unit' is a basic unit in modern Chinese social constitution that embodies 'the family function and responsibility'. Moreover, the interpersonal relationships of individual employees in their working units also have the characteristics of being hierarchical and interdependent.

During the period of planned economy, for many Chinese the working unit was not only a working place for earning the salary, but was also the source of almost all aspects of life, and even their spiritual home. This was because Chinese working units had many familial functions. In the past, large enterprises and institutions provided their employees with all aspects of needs in their lives, including housing distribution, kindergartens and schools for employees' children, hospitals, dining halls, barber-shops, cinemas, basket-ball courses and so on. In northern China many working units were also responsible for buying coals and vegetables for employees' families for winter consumption, and distributing some kinds of supplies for daily use. Even after employees were retired, the working units still paid their pensions and they were able to enjoy part of the welfare of working employees. After the implementation of market economy, although the scale of welfare and service provided by working units for their employees has been rapidly shrinking, parts of it are still preserved.

However, while providing high welfare, working units also had power and influence over their employees' professional development and professional identity. The leaders of a working unit were not only managers; they also functioned as parents and had to take the responsibilities and obligations of parents. In a 'working unit' the main theme was that the unit's interests were more important than an employee's interests. As it applied to the society, it implied that the collective interests of working units and communities were more important than those of families, and that the interests of the nation were the most important of all.

In the system of working units, intellectuals gained a social identity and a home. However, the cost was that intellectuals lost many of their personal characteristics. They were no longer free agents but people affiliated to working units.[3]

[3]Chinese scholars, Zizhong Zhang and Chunshi Yang, expatiated on the identity of Chinese intellectuals from a historical perspective and drew a vivid picture concerning the role that working units played in intellectuals' personal development (Yang, 2003; Zhang, 2003).

Therefore, compared with individuals in Western cultures, Chinese keep a far narrower psychological space between one's self and others in terms of personal psychological growth and professional development. The construction and maintenance of one's self-esteem and self-confidence are greatly influenced by expectations and evaluations of parents, family members and other authority figures. When they are young, parents' attitudes are the main influence. When they go to school, they began to be affected by the opinions of teachers and peers. When they begin work, they are influenced by the opinions of superiors, leaders and colleagues. Alan Roland described the self–object relationship of North Americans as 'I–self-regard''; the self–object relationship of Asians should be described as 'we–self-regard'.

After the reform and opening up of China in 1980s and the disassembling of working units formed in the planned economy, intellectuals in all kinds of professions began to enjoy greater freedom and space in choosing and developing their own professions. However, at the same time, the constitution of the intellectuals group became more diverse and complicated, which resulted in increasingly incoherent self-identity. Chinese intellectuals again faced the crisis and challenge in forming and developing their professional identity. Since clinical psychology and counseling psychology, including psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, are comparatively new disciplines, people who become involved in these fields also experience an atmosphere where challenges are mingled with opportunities.

The analysis of the current situation of learners and practitioners for psychoanalytical psychotherapy in China

The majority of learners and practitioners of psychoanalysis in Chinese mainland currently come from 'working units'. Take the participants for the first Sino–Norway Continuous Training Program for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy (six intensive trainings in three years) as an example. Among 90 participants, 25 (27.8 per cent) came from colleges and universities, 14 (15.6 per cent) from general hospitals, 38 (42.2 per cent) from psychiatric hospitals, 8 (8.9 per cent) from private psychological counseling centers and 5 (5.5 per cent) from other organizations. In general, more than 85 per cent of participants were employed by universities, general hospitals and psychiatric hospitals and 91 per cent of participants were employees of working units.

The first nine IPA candidates in Chinese mainland were all psychiatrists or teachers from universities, who at the same time work as psychotherapists.

The following data is the registry information of Chinese mainland participants for the IPA First Asia Conference in Beijing in October 2010 (see Table 1).

In general, those who are employees of working units account for 76.5 per cent of the participants, 24.4 per cent are private practitioners, and 28.4 per cent received a medical degree.

From the data above, it can be seen that the majority of learners and practitioners are employees of working units. However, it seems that the

Table 1. Chinese participants in the IPA 1st Asia Conference

Total number: 262 (Final Count on 10 Oct. 2010)		
Category	*Number*	*Percentage*
Research center/Institution	11	4.20%
Universities	85	42.40%
Psychiatric hospitals	44	16.60%
General hospitals	31	11.80%
Private practitioners/Psychological center	64	24.40%
Judicial system	4	1.53%
Not specified	23	8.78%

number of private practitioners in the field of psychoanalytic psychotherapy in general is increasing, accounting for nearly a quarter.

Both employees of working units and private practitioners are experiencing or will experience the challenge of forming and developing a psychoanalytical psychotherapist's professional identity. For those who are employed by working units, their conflicts and confusions often derive from the conflicts between the multiple professional roles they now have. For the most private practitioners, because of their inadequate professional training and comparatively low academic status, they are disengaged from professional organizations and become 'professional wanderers' who belong neither to any working unit nor professional organization. In this article I will focus on the experience of the former group, and discuss the professional identity of psychoanalytical psychotherapists in the context of working units.

Firstly, it should be noted that, for employees of working units, the first-rank professional identity comes from their working units. They are doctors, teachers or school staff members. The learner and practitioner of psychoanalytical psychotherapy only come as the second-rank professional identity. The working unit is the big family in one's career life, and eight working hours belong to one's working unit. The development of one's personal professional capacity is closely related to the development and prospect of his/her working unit. Although currently few working units provide their employees with all kinds of welfare as they did in the period of planned economy, the hierarchical relationship still exists in the administrative system. By providing their employees with the opportunity for professional training, and education, and by implementing the evaluation system and the specific technical position ranking system of certain professions in China, working units exert control and influence on their employees. In return, after the individual improves his/her professional capacity, he/she can then help to improve the general capability level of the working unit. In this context of reciprocal relationship where individual interests are closely related to the interests of a working unit, a working unit thus acquires a family function. Managers or supervisors are like patriarchs of different levels, whereas employees are like children. For learners and practitioners from

working units, a common difficulty is that, while learning and practicing psychoanalytical therapy, they have to take on the original working responsibility and very often have to do extra administrative work. Therefore, both psychologically and in reality, they have less scope in their career life to make choices following their own wishes (compared with those in Western countries).

Besides, from childhood time into the adult age, many people cling to the advice such as 'Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise' and 'Speech is silver, silence is gold', by accepting all working unit arrangements and obeying all commands, and experience their career with ordinary quality. Most people take this attitude for granted. However, the thinking style and attitude of psychoanalysis may shake up these people's original personal and professional identities.

Secondly, the history of psychoanalytical therapy in China is only 13 years old (dating from the first Sino–German Training Program in 1997). Even at places like psychiatric hospitals or departments of psychology in universities where many psychotherapists work, the development of this profession is still in its infancy. Compared to the great number of clients and patients who need help, the number of experienced psychoanalytical psychotherapists is very small. Of these, those who can do research, receive research grants and publish papers in the field of psychoanalysis are even fewer (compared with other more mature professions, such as psychiatry). Moreover, since the fee level for psychotherapy covered by Chinese medical insurance is rather low, and universities offer free therapy for their students, these conditions inevitably devalue the professional status of psychoanalytical therapists. Therefore, when one's professional capacity is evaluated according to how much money one makes, as well as the number of published papers and research grants one has, learners and practitioners of psychoanalytical psychotherapy are trapped in a difficult situation. They experience the high cost of learning (the cost of time and money) and, at the same time, have the sense of 'low production and low contribution' in their working units. This difficult situation leads to two extremes of development for these people in their working units: one is towards being a 'person with ability', and the other is towards being 'the eccentric talent', or being both at the same time.

It is fortunate to become a 'person with ability'. For some of those who belong to this category were specialists in their working units before they began to learn psychoanalytical psychotherapy (for instance, most participants for the first Sino–German Training Program were sent by their working units as 'persons of ability', and this was a very important factor behind the success of the training program). Others were young people who were regarded as having potential to become 'persons with ability' by their working units. These people often had a Master's degree or above and could speak English fluently. They joined this field with a deep interest in psychoanalysis and some were students of the first group of psychoanalytical therapists in China. In fact these 'fortunate' people had to endure more hardship. They were torn between being a psychoanalytical psychotherapist and being an employee of a working unit. They usually had many

professional roles, such as psychiatrist, teacher, psychotherapist, researcher, administrator and secretary. Thus, it was very difficult for them to concentrate on learning and practicing psychoanalysis. This agony was shared among learners and practitioners who came from working units.

Those who became 'the eccentric talent' had more difficulties in their working units. One difficulty was being lonely and misunderstood. Their self-esteem and professional identity might receive extra blows if they had a low income. Since their ability to do psychotherapy could not be valued in their working units, or they had to perform their capacity according to the established rules or the general interests of working units (for example, one is to be evaluated according to the number of research grants received and research papers published), some who needed more freedom would leave their working units and open their own private practice. For those who chose to stay, they would try their best to do what they wanted to do and were therefore marginalized in their working units. Although these people are limited in number, they are highly representative. China today is becoming more and more open, and those who choose to leave their working units and start a private practice enjoy quite a large space for development, and they can run a privately-owned company offering a psychological counseling service. However, in fact, the market lacks related policies and laws. Therefore, except for the developmental space in terms of economy, private practitioners are 'free' in terms of their professional identity and the sense of belonging.

The above situations highlight the conflicts and paradoxes between personal interests and the need for independence, and the system in existence in working units. In their inner worlds, these conflicts are between the wish for independence and the need to be recognized by others and authority figures.

Thirdly, there is a kind of anxious attitude of 'take-in-and-apply-it' under the influence of pragmatism, which is quite popular nowadays. With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, there is an atmosphere of intensive competition in society in pursuit of speed and rank. Being 'the first one' is far more important than being 'the only one'. Being 'the first one' means you are highly valued and approved in the group while being 'the only one' often runs the risk of being categorized as 'eccentric' or 'abnormal'.

Especially in this era of overemphasizing the satisfaction of material needs, fast-food-like cultural activities are more likely to be popular among people. The main aim of life is to enjoy the material fruits of modernization. Psychoanalysis can become a topic for chat in people's leisure time. However, its unique, profound and systematic theories and thinking, as well as its long and rigorous training process, make it hard for modern people to digest. Besides, it is against the quick rhythm of reviving the great China, and, in particular, the anxiety and impatience underlying the rapid development. For learners and practitioners, it is a real challenge as to whether they can endure loneliness and solitude, whether they are able to 'keep their head while all about others are losing theirs', whether they can wait until the moment when 'those who laugh last laugh loudest' (that is, delayed satisfaction).

As to future development, I have several thoughts:

- The professional organization of psychoanalysis in China (IPA China Allied Center, i.e. the Psychoanalytic Committee of China Association for Mental Health) needs to shoulder the major responsibility. In the process of gathering talented people, facilitating the domestic and international exchange and communication, and establishing standard and systemic training programs, professional organizations should try to attract more learners and practitioners to join the organizations and help them to find the sense of 'family' and achieve a sense of belonging and professional identity. In order to do this, it is essential to gain the support from the working unit to which the professional organization is affiliated (most Chinese professional organizations are affiliated to working units) and to integrate resources all over China. The professional organization can open up the membership to all learners and practitioners of psychoanalysis in China and establish, develop and implement the relevant rules and standards.
- I hope that IPA and IPA China Committee may take the opportunity of the First Asia Conference to have deeper dialogues and communications with Chinese colleagues and to consider developing the training program in universities (so-called working units), tailoring it to learners from different backgrounds and combining it with educational degrees. (Psychoanalysis can be a discipline in applied psychology in universities, whereas in medical schools it can be divided into two disciplines, the master's degree and the doctoral degree in medicine in the field of psychiatry, and the master's degree and the doctoral degree of science in applied psychology.)
- The training of Chinese IPA candidates may include the component of how to do research, so as to help young candidates acquire a solid base in their working units, especially those who come from universities and hospitals.

It is hoped that, through these efforts, the development of psychoanalysis, which enjoys its 100th birthday, will be more vigorous. It is also hoped that Chinese learners and practitioners can find a place where they can seek a sense of belonging and developing their professional identity, so that the training and education of psychoanalysis in China can be successful.

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