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Integration within Chinese Cultures: Wind and Sun

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### Integration within Chinese Cultures: Wind and Sun

*The North Wind and the Sun argued over who was the most powerful, and came to an agreement that whoever could first strip a wayfaring man of his clothes would be declared the victor. The North Wind went first and tried his power, blowing with all his might. However, the keener his blasts, the more tightly the Traveler wrapped his cloak around him, until at last, resigning all hope of victory, the Wind called upon the Sun to see what he could do. The Sun suddenly shone out with all his warmth. The Traveler no sooner felt his genial rays that he took off one garment after another, and at last, fairly overcome with heat, undressed and bathed in a stream that lay in his path.*

*~~Moral: Persuasion is better than force<sup>1</sup>.*

Since I was a kid, I was taught that the moral of the fable “The North Wind and the Sun” is that “persuasion is better than force.” Wind and sun are both natural forces, but each influences creatures in its own way. If we take the metaphor of the sun and the wind as symbols of integrating two diverse epistemologies, then the psychotherapy tradition could be identified as sun, while our theological tradition could be identified as wind. Most of Christians grew up in that climate of “wind”—cold, directive, forceful, evangelical, holy, moral, and disciplined orthodox church. Then one day, we meet the “sun”—a humanitarian, warm, non-coercive, passionate, empathic, graceful and radiant psychology. After personal therapy and clinical training, Christian therapists gradually master a “second language” in

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Aesop's fable, provided by <http://members.shaw.ca/keithheidorn/wxdr/aesop.htm>.

psychology, which values self-love, boundaries, positivism, self-efficacy, individual responsibility, respect, and unconditional acceptance. Little by little, under the exposure of the sun, we let down our “defense mechanism” and realize that we could be safe under it.

If the story were to end here, it would illustrate only the first part of my journey in integration as a Chinese-Malaysian Christian. After being exposed to the sun for a long time, I feel stronger as an individual traveler, but then I am also alone and lonely. I remember the good old times when the wind blew and people drew together. When the rain poured, there was shelter. When the earth shook, you leaned on something and someone. Even when the winter season came, there was someone in the community to give you a cloak to warm your body. Is it possible to have the way of the sun and still go back to the way of the wind? Does different culture or tradition adapt to the sun and the wind differently?

Having expanded my interpretation of the original fable, “The North Wind and the Sun,” the thesis of this paper is to address the questions above. Leaning toward the postmodernist’s end of the continuum of integration discourse, I believe that our ways of practicing Christian therapy is informed by our cultural assumptions or religious traditions. In order to explore an indigenous Chinese way of doing integration, this paper will review what the West has attempted in the past century and what limitations there might be. Work by MacIntyre, Walzer, Dueck and their ilk will be summarized to indicate the urgency and necessity of this task. My criticism will focus on the history of many psychologists’ departure from a thick community (the wind) and adopting a thin epistemology (the sun). As a work in progress, I will briefly sketch a cultural-sensitive approach to integration through personal reflection on Chinese philosophy and ethics. Lastly, if we do not pay heed

to such a mandate, we will pose harm to our Chinese clients by introducing a context-free integration model. This will be demonstrated by imagining a Chinese client who emerges from and is rooted in a thick, morally grounded community.

### **Part 1: Integration Model from the West**

As a product of modernization, Western psychology endorses the positivism and enlightenment tradition, which upholds empiricism and individual development. It is foundational to the discipline of psychology and its impact has been ubiquitous, including the integration models developed by Christian psychologists. It is not my intention to minimize or abandon modern psychology or devalue their contribution in the past century, however, coming from a third world country, it is my mission to advocate for the communal virtues in religious and ethnic traditions. The slighting of morality and virtue in positivism and modernism has resulted in a heavy cost in the past century. Even among Christian scholars, existed integration models tends to have no interest in the particularities within culture, but rather is concerned primarily with generalizations emerging from empirically based research and using biblical principles to validate psychological theories. The myopia of this proposal overlooks the fact that modern psychotherapy is just one tradition among all other traditions.

Not until recent years, moving from a modern integration discourse to a postmodern one, the criteria of epistemological foundationalism, autonomous individuality and the universality of scientific knowledge have been challenged (Dueck & Parsons, 2004). In his book, *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre (1999) asks why human beings need virtues. He challenges modern philosophers who assume that the human individual is an independent, rational and superior being. Grounding his theories in

Aristotle and Aquinas, he reintroduces the animality of human beings—that is, our vulnerability and affliction. Since we all suffer loss, grief, bodily illness, mental defects, and other limitations, we need to depend on “each other” for survival and safety. Through this dependence, virtue is fostered and continues to flourish. As illustrated by MacIntyre, the traditionalist approach advocates a moral language that is embedded in culture and community and forms a framework for the life and identity of its members.

Dueck and Reimer (2003) also argue that the uncritical exportation of the liberal tradition in psychology may invalidate, suppress, or even replace localized meanings that are central to the mental health of indigenous peoples. They call for a “tradition-sensitive psychotherapy.” The primary value of this therapy model is to enrich the client’s tradition without imposing the assumptions of the therapist’s particular tradition. Therapists must be aware of their own particularity and how the differences between the virtues in the therapist and the client will foster or repress the cultural identity and virtue of the clients. For the tradition-sensitive clinician, the telos of the therapeutic encounter is embedded within the history of the client’s tradition, which is consistent with their community. The therapist will utilize both the shared meanings (thin) and also the particular, prioritized virtues (thick) of the client.

Walzer (1994) defined thick morality as “richly referential, culturally resonant, locked into a locally established symbolic system or network of meanings” (p. xi). For Walzer, thick and thin moralities are complementary, depending on situation and purpose. Just like the sun and the wind, we do not have to choose to live with either climate. However, modern psychologists have risked the cost of moral minimalism by assuming thinness of theories in the past. It is time, I believe, not only to nurture a “thick” approach

of psychotherapy, but integration of Christianity and psychology. Inspired by Dueck and Reimer's (2003) approach, I believe that doing integration akin to doing therapy, and we should take into the thickness of tradition and culture while practicing integration.

### **Part 2: Indigenous Integration Model in the Chinese Context**

If the integration between psychology and theology is bound by culture and tradition, then the integrator should examine their underpinning ethnic or cultural assumptions. In the past century, many Chinese Christians have forsaken their own traditional wisdom and embraced their religious identity as Christians. Chinese psychologists also have been baptized by the Western psychology of egalitarian, self-sufficiency, and positivism. The common saying—"The moon in the Western country is more beautiful" has penetrated the thoughts of many Chinese, forgetting that the moon, the sun, and the wind are also just as present in our own Chinese sky. Now is the time to reclaim the treasure (both as an ethical and spiritual tradition) hidden inside broken vessels by returning to the philosophy that has inherited the Chinese mind for thousands of years and relating it to our Christian identity.

#### ***Ancient Chinese philosophy***

In his widely referred book, *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, Charles Moore (1967) collated a series of essays written on Chinese philosophy, and noted the inseparable relationship between philosophy, spirituality, and ethics in Chinese culture. In this section, I will briefly summarize the thoughts of several major Chinese philosophers as grounds to support an imperative to uncover an indigenous Chinese integration approach in traditional wisdoms.

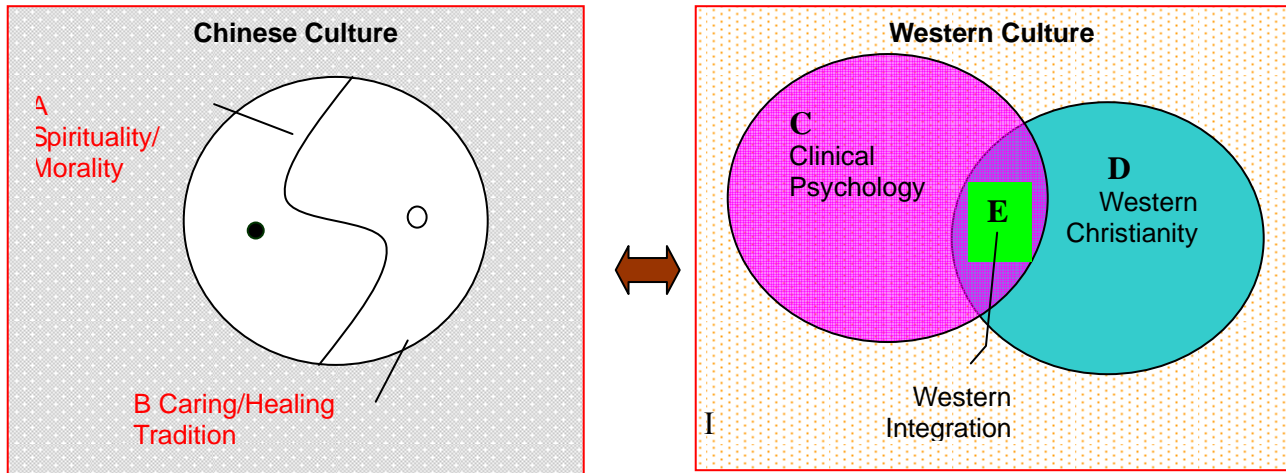
As Confucius said, the ultimate satisfaction in the human life is to "understand the

*Tao* (the Word, or the Way) in the morning before you die in the evening.” (Analects 4:8) He teaches that all human beings ought to strive towards becoming a “sage” (or superior person), who embraces *Jen* (*humanity*) and embodies *Tao*. A person with *Jen* wishes to establish his or her own character, as well as the character of others. He or she values righteousness, modesty, and love, has strong self-disciplinary power, and is slow in words but diligent in action. The foundation of the Confucian system lies in the moral realm—the doctrine of *Chung Yung* (also known as Central Harmony, Golden Mean, which emphasizes the ability to hold balance and harmony in the midst of diversity and extremes.

Mencius, who was a student of Confucius, continued the Confucius teaching of good and harmony, by assuming an ethical statement for all human beings: “man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward.” (Mencius VI, A: 2, 2) This kind of humanistic viewpoint has the space for Heaven, godliness, and spirituality, which contrast the humanism of the West.

Lao Tzu is another school of thought that parallels Confucianism in its emphasis of harmony with nature, but diverges on the order of self versus nature. For Lao Tzu, to live a simple life is enough to restore the virtue of personhood and human purpose whereas Confucianism believes that the fulfillment of life comes with the full development of the person. In the case of Lao Tzu, the keynote of his *Tao-Te-Ching* (Classic of the Way and its Virtue) is “simplicity,” pursuing plainness, discarding desire and selfishness. He even criticized Confucianism—“when the Great Way (*Tao*) declined, the doctrine of humanity and righteousness arose. When knowledge and wisdom appeared, there emerged great hypocrisy.” (Dao De Jing chapter 18, by Lao Tzu) Hence, his doctrine of *Wu-wei* (inaction) is makes more sense in view of his argument with Confucius’s humanism.

After condensing 5,000 years of Chinese philosophy, what I am trying to point out is that reclaiming the Chinese philosophies is a necessary process in reclaiming the caring tradition in a Chinese context. The reasoning is depicted in the graphs below:



Though with good intentions, many Christian counselors inevitably exported the Western integration model (E) to Chinese community without carefully scrutinizing its cultural presuppositions that may go against indigenous culture. As we have seen in the first half of this paper, E is limited by culture and context. Translating E into a foreign culture will risk “imperialism” and a repetition of the violent history in the twentieth century.

Instead of importing E, the product of integrating C (Clinical Psychology) and D (Western Christianity), I suggest integrating A and B as the priority, because both of them are embedded in the same tradition and linguistic neighborhood. In another word, the integration in Chinese culture may not be a dualistic and linear approach; instead it could be a balanced, dynamic process, represent by the symbol of “yin-yang.” To integrate is to find the caring tradition in Chinese philosophy and ethics, rather than just adopting the Western methodology or models of integration.

In the remaining portion of this article, I will use the narrative of an ancient Chinese



heroine to demonstrate the harm of not taking tradition seriously in contemporary caring professions. Ultimately I hope to reconstruct a more indigenous, heart language for caring and healing.

***Mulan in the therapy room?***

From the rich history of ancient China, the legend of Mulan has been passed through generations and dynasties. The story of Mulan is based on a 2,000 year-old Chinese poem about a girl who disguised herself as a man in order to join the army in her father's place. The legend of this great heroine was portrayed in a Disney movie but through the lens of Western modernism. Mulan was introduced as a confused young lady, feeling depressed under the gender hierarchy in ancient China. The only way she found her "true self" was through rebellion against the traditional norm, and experimenting with another gender role. Eventually she found herself liberated through the success of the battle and finding a "true love." This seems like a twist commonly seen in Hollywood movies, but it suggests a far more deep-rooted problem. If a "Mulan" comes to the door for therapy, how would a typical Western-trained therapist work with her?

Possibly, a therapist using a universal therapy approach will empathize her fear of losing her father for a few sessions, then slowly point out her excessive tendency of taking responsibility for others and ignoring her own needs. From a family systemic model, a therapist would also like to work with the family on the boundary issue, since Mulan is too "enmeshed" with her father, and probably acted out her middle child syndrome.<sup>2</sup> From a feminist viewpoint, Mulan is the stereotype of her society and a victim of gender oppression. She is very unsure of her gender identity because in a sexist society, she is not

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<sup>2</sup> According to the story, Mulan has an elder sister and a younger brother.

the expected son. She might need to prove herself through self-advocacy and identity formation. A dynamic therapist might explore her suppressed anger against her father for being absent during her childhood. A behavioral psychologist would confront her self-limiting thoughts, and teach her relaxation techniques to alleviate her anxiety.

Lastly, a Christian therapist might as well discourage her fantasy of cross-dressing and deceiving the public. There is no basis for doing “integration” with Mulan since she does not claim to be a believer of any religion, nor does she believe in any higher power or spiritual force. How could the Holy Spirit talk to her when she only knows the language of filial piety and loyalty to the king? Where are the traditional virtues of loyalty, filial piety, family honor and gender differentiation inside of therapy?

If a therapist had successfully removed Mulan’s “shame” of being a female and her guilt of not helping her father, there might never have been such a legendary heroine in the Chinese history. There would have been no moral exemplar for millions of Chinese women, who are seeking hope and pride in their gender role. In contrary, the story is not remembered as a deceitful act by Chinese, but a wise decision made by a brave woman sacrificing her gender identity in order to help preserve her family’s honor, reputation, and integrity. If a therapist were not sensitive to her tradition, the harm posed to Mulan would be not only the distortion that occurred in the Disney movie, but an erosion of a communal identity and deprivation of a deep-rooted morality.

The fear of risking her father’s life and losing her country are the toxins in Mulan’s soul, yet the moral obligation is a catalyst to the healing of a female heroine. She fulfilled her obligation as the older daughter of the family, and a brave soldier of the country. She solved her moral dilemma through deceiving others about her gender identity because the

sense of obligation to otherness is greater than her sense of self. A thick therapist should be able to understand her dilemma and obligation, and help her fulfill that obligation and acknowledge her sacrificial love. Only through the dependency on others could she find her ontological purpose, which could be reframed as “kenosis” and incarnational love in Christian spirituality. Who says that integration must start from “without” and not “within”?

### **The End of a Beginning**

According to a Chinese saying—“The water that bears the boat is the same that swallows it up,” (Zhenguan politics chapter 1, Wu Jin of Tang Dynasty) I acknowledge limitations in my argument for an indigenous Chinese integration model such as nostalgia for the past, confusion of tradition with folklore practices, and the exclusiveness of otherness. While there is always a risk inside integration, what we can learn is to navigate our sails on the sea of Chinese philosophy, and to master the timing and forces of the sun and the wind.

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