1 Confucianism and Healing

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Four paradigmatic philosophers seem to have emerged from 600 BC to AD 200 in four places: (1) Ancient Greece, (2) the Middle East, (3) India, and (4) China. They created cultural systems common to each area without any direct transmission of ideas from one region to another. Confucianism established by pre-Qin Confucianists (Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi) has gradually become a transcendental formal structure for sustaining the life-world of Chinese people.

This chapter explores the historical and cultural origin of Confucianism. It discusses the Chinese worldview model of equilibrium, as well as Confucian ethics for ordinary people. The chapter also considers the differences between the relative ethics of five cardinal relationships (*wu lun*) and the absolute ethics of three bonds (*san gang*). A description of illness representations and conceptualizations of health, Confucian practice of self-cultivation and its implications for psychological healing and psychotherapy will also be discussed.

Historical and Cultural Origin of Confucianism

Confucius (551–479 BC), the most respected educator in Chinese history, was born in the state of Lu (now Shandong Province) during the turmoil of the Spring and Autumn period (772–484 BC) in ancient China. His father, a mid-rank official, died when he was 3 years old. Confucius worked as a shepherd and as an accountant for a noble family. He was very interested in the rites and institutions that prevailed in a much earlier period of Chinese history during the Zhou dynasty (1122–256 BC) and devoted himself to the

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study of the traditional Zhou culture. During Confucius's lifetime, feudal princes were frequently trying to usurp the throne. He hoped to restore social order by advocating a return to the morality of loyalty and the ethical system of filial piety. Confucius began his career as a public teacher at the age of 22. His fame gradually increased, and it is said that he attracted 72 disciples and more than 3,000 students, which earned him a good reputation and made him well known.

In 517 BC, Duke Chao of Lu engaged in an open quarrel with three hereditary ministerial families in the state, who were continually encroaching on the authority of their feudal ruler. Confucius fled into Chi, the adjoining state, to avoid the prevailing disorder. After the rebellion was suppressed, he returned to the state of Lu at the age of 51 and obtained a position in the government. He was forced to resign after 3 months as he failed to persuade the king to destroy three castles constructed by feudal princes. From the age of 54, he toured with some of his disciples around various states for a period of 14 years, hoping that his political advocacy might be accepted by other feudal kings.

Confucius identified himself as an educator whose mandate was to rectify the world by teaching virtues. In attempting to restore the feudal social order of the early Zhou dynasty, he spent a lot of time researching and recording rites and music for ceremonies and other occasions expressing one's dedication to family, country, and state. He also edited poems and classics collected from various states, including Lu, Zhou, Sung, and Chi. He wrote a history of Lu, titled *Spring and Autumn*. In his late years, he annotated 10 supplements to the oracular text *The I Ching*, which is considered the most ancient Chinese book of philosophy and cosmology. All of these were used as teaching materials.

Interpretation of *The I Ching*

The reinterpretation of ***The I Ching*** by Confucianists has very important implications for its rationalization in ancient China. *The I Ching* was originally a divination text in ancient China. During the Spring and Autumn period (221–481 BC), Confucius and his disciples were said to have written the *Shi Yi* (十翼, *Ten Wings*) as well as a series of commentaries on *The I Ching*. The Confucianists' interpretation of *The I Ching* had transformed it into a "philosophical masterpiece" of Confucian philosophy and cosmology.[1] Meanwhile, Laozi's (or Lao Tze's; 604–531 BC) interpretation had helped the post-Warring States Taoists to develop Chinese organic sciences.[2]

The Chinese Worldview Model of Equilibrium

The works of these schools (Confucianism and Taoism) have contributed to the formation of a **Chinese worldview model of equilibrium**. Using the

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method of structuralism, anthropologist Li analyzed the folk religions, legends, and myths prevalent in Chinese society and constructed a Chinese worldview model of equilibrium.[3] The word *equilibrium* used in Li's model comes from the Confucian golden mean, in which the term was used to mean "to reach balance and harmony." Li proposed that the most fundamental operating rule in traditional Chinese cosmology is to seek balance and harmony between humans and nature, humans and society, and humans and ego. The most ideal and perfect states in traditional culture all aim at such a state of balance and harmony. In order to reach these ideal states, it is necessary to maintain balance and harmony within each of the three systems. The equilibrium worldview model comprises balance and harmony within each of the three systems.

Harmony With Nature

The first level of harmony is harmony with nature, which can be expressed in two aspects: (1) time and (2) space. In Chinese folk belief, harmony of temporality is manifest in the explanation of one's fortune in life in coordination with cosmic time. Four pairs of signs represent the time, date, month, and year in which a person was born. The two characters of each pair are adopted from 10 celestial stems and 12 terrestrial branches and are usually called eight characters. The eight characters that represent one's birth time may determine one's life experience or fate (*ming*). To many Chinese, fate is determined at birth. In coordination with cosmic time, an individual's life experience will take on various changes as a consequence of good or bad luck. In the traditional system of Chinese belief, fate is unchangeable, while luck can be changed with the aid of various forces. Seeking harmony with temporality is revealed in this changeable fortune.

The second aspect of maintaining balance with nature is spatial arrangement. Ideas of spatial harmony are constructed on the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, the five elements (*wu-hsin*), and the eight trigrams (*ba-gua*). The combination of these factors constitutes a belief in geomancy (*feng shui*).

Harmony Within the Individual

Maintaining harmony within the individual can be divided into two parts: (1) internal substantial harmony and (2) external formal harmony. The former explains the harmony within the human body mainly by the dynamic equilibrium between the two opposing forces of ***yin* and *yang***. Based on these concepts, a very complicated system of Chinese medicine and food has been developed. If an individual's body is basically cold, that person should consume more hot foods to keep in balance, while a person whose body is basically hot should consume more cold foods. If the body overheats, more cold food or medicine will be needed to keep the balance and vice versa. The food

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that people should eat changes with the weather: More hot foods should be eaten in the winter, and more cold foods should be consumed in the summer to maintain the equilibrium of *yin* and *yang* within the body. The harmony of the external form is mainly represented in the use of one's name. In the traditional Chinese theory of naming, names are not just signs or symbols; names entail a transforming force for the individual. Two aspects represent a person's name. The first is related to the five elements; the second is the number of strokes required to write one's name. Both show an individual's search for balance in external forms.

Interpersonal Harmony

Harmony existing in a person's social relationships is the steadfast goal of the Confucian value system, which itself is the ethical foundation of social order. Confucian theory of self-cultivation requires everyone to practice the doctrine of "exerting oneself" (*zhong*, 忠, literally, "loyalty") and "putting oneself in the place of the other" (*shu*, 恕, "forgiveness") in one's five cardinal relationships (*wu lun*) between father and son, sovereign and subordinate, husband and wife, older and younger brother, and friends. Since the Martial Emperor of the Han dynasty (158–87 BC) accepted Dong Zhong Shu's (179–104 BC) proposal to dismiss the hundred schools by revering Confucianism solely, the three bonds (*san gang*) had been frequently and closely linked to five cardinal ethics (*wuchang*), which delineated the absolute authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife, and have had profound influence over Chinese culture in general. As the politicized Confucian ideology of control, the institution of three bonds was a deliberate attempt to utilize Confucian values for the maintenance of a specific social order. It is detrimental to human flourishing. On the contrary, the five cardinal ethics deliberated by Mencius with self-cultivation is not only compatible with but also essential to interpersonal harmony and personal growth.

Illness Representations and Conceptualizations of Health

Culture may shape not only patterns of emotional expression but also help-seeking behaviors when one experiences physical or psychological disturbances that are mediated by the concept of illness prevailing in that culture. In order to illustrate this point, a distinction should be made between the concepts of *disease* and *illness*. These ideas are underpinned by Confucianism. Disease is a pathological concept, while illness is a cultural one. In the modern concept of medicine, disease indicates infection by germs or a virus. It is a biological or pathological phenomenon that can be examined in a clinic or laboratory. Illness indicates the social recognition that one

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cannot appropriately carry out daily duties and that a series of acts must be taken to improve the situation. A person's illness is meaningless unless the concept of that illness is recognized in that person's culture. Disease means malfunctions of one's physique. Illness implies this but also implies a threat to the individual's social existence.[4] In her field study in a village of northern Taiwan, anthropologist Chang discovered that the peasants' illness behaviors were profoundly influenced by their concepts of illness.[5] The peasants recognized a disease by examining their own feelings and thought that an illness meant that the body felt uncomfortable and painful and that the person could not work or rest: "A feeling of hurt is an illness" (p. 125).[6] This statement points out that pain is an indicator of illness. A cold, minor cut or an incised wound is not illness. An illness means a feeling of discomfort inside the body; it makes an individual unable to assume the regularity of life.

Multiple Treatments

A disease may not be a necessary condition for seeing a medical doctor. It may depend on the extent of the seriousness of the disease. A slight disease is "feeling uncomfortable." It just requires getting more rest and taking good care of one's health. A serious disease is "feeling much discomfort, having to lie in bed and being unable to work, even move."[7] This condition causes one to see a doctor and to take medicine. Whether one sees a doctor also depends on the patient's social status. Thus, Chinese people have a specific criterion for judging the seriousness of an illness. The peasants' concepts about the cause of illness included the following:

1. Physique: congenitally weak and easily sick
2. Heredity: weak-minded with epilepsy that comes from the ancestors
3. Infection: cold, cough, or smallpox
4. Influence by external evil: god, ghost, geomantic omen, or changes of one's fortune
5. Influence by internal evil: internal heat, virtual and weak circulation

Chang further indicated that people decide the way to seek medical aid after making a self-diagnosis and conjecturing the cause of illness. If the patient believes that the disease is caused by internal factors, the person will seek help from Western or Chinese medicine for curing the discomforts of the body. If a patient feels that the disease is caused by a supernatural power, after interacting with a doctor the patient may seek help from a witch doctor. A feature of Chinese patients' medicine-seeking behavior is that they do not insist on seeing a doctor of Western medicine, Chinese medicine, or

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traditional therapy. They care only about the effectiveness of the treatment, leading to the multiple treatments.

Psychiatric Stigma and Shame

In Western countries, especially for the Catholics, confessions to a priest may be a part of people's lives. But there is no such practice as confession in the Chinese cultural tradition. In Buddhism, the ritual of repenting one's sins is performed within one's own mind, not before a priest. In **Confucianism**, the act of self-reflection is performed for oneself, not for others. In other words, Chinese people are not used to telling the secrets or worries in their minds to others. It is a matter of cultural reliance for a westerner to disclose personal secrets to a professional such as a counseling psychologist, but under the influence of Confucian ethics, a Chinese person tends to disclose secrets only to very close friends, if anyone at all.

Kleinman distinguished the thoughts and affects of Chinese people into two categories: (1) those that are superficial and public and that can be appropriately performed according to one's status in responding to social demands and (2) those that are hidden and private and that should be brought under control and revealed only to very few intimate persons.[8] Emotional disturbances are generally viewed as personal affairs that should be controlled by one's own will. Failure to control one's emotions is generally viewed as a sign of an immature personality. Fabrega compared psychiatric stigma in several non-Western societies and found that suffering from psychiatric disorder is a matter of extreme shame in Chinese society.[9] He reviewed the literature on Chinese law and medicine, which surprisingly indicated that the pathology of Chinese medicine contains no obvious stigma for psychiatric patients. Psychiatric stigma originates from the bureaucratic system of the Chinese Empire, which was dominated by Confucian ideology. For instance, in the Han dynasty, an insane man who killed his mother and brother was sentenced to be executed in public for his violation of Confucian ethics. Tseng said that if a patient is reporting his physical complaints repeatedly without any indication of being able to talk about a psychological disturbance, it is very likely that the patient is blocked by an intense feeling of shame or embarrassment in doing so.[10] Such a resistance might be caused by the popular belief that domestic scandals should not be publicized. Conservative Chinese may thus be unable to discuss "disgraceful affairs" within their families with a therapist.

Suppression in Communication

In their attempt to explain the formation of **somatization** orientation for Chinese people, Kleinman and Lin argued that in one's process of being

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socialized, a Chinese person usually has to learn to suppress feelings of unhappiness and express them by way of physical communication.[11] When suffering from psychosomatic symptoms, attention is focused on physical reactions to the stressful situation, and there is a tendency to report experience in this way. Kleinman tried to induce Chinese patients to talk about their feelings of anxiety, but patients would only say that they felt depressed, anxious, and fearful.[12] They were unable to provide concrete examples or illustrations and instead described the cause of their physical disease or the interpersonal problems directly.

Some experienced psychiatrists have also reported that Chinese patients tend to disclose their worries only to intimate friends.[13]A strong feeling of shame—and their keen sensitivity to showing only appropriate behavior in front of others—may inhibit them from disclosing their disturbances to a stranger, even one who is a psychiatrist in a system of Western medicine. This is the reason "frank and sincere communication" is regarded as the crucial technique in Chinese psychiatry, and the nature of the interpersonal relationship between the therapist and the client is viewed as the most important factor for successful psychotherapy.

Application of Confucianism Principles and Practices to Psychological Healing

Pre-Qin Confucianists advocated that from the Son of Heaven down to the mass of ordinary people, all must consider cultivation of the self as the root of everything (*Great Learning*, classic Chapter 1). The pre-Qin Confucian theory of self-cultivation consisted of four steps, namely to rectify the mind, to be sincere in thoughts, to extend knowledge to the utmost, and to investigate the world. Maintaining the tranquility and peace of mind was the first step of self-cultivation.

Rectification of the Mind

When an individual is being stirred by such emotional disturbances as terror, fond regard, sorrow and distress, it is very unlikely for him or her to maintain the state of tranquility and peace of mind. She or he tends to "look but oversee," to "hear without understanding," to "eat without taste"; it is very difficult for him or her to acquire new knowledge or solve any problem. Therefore, rectifying the mind was regarded as the first step for cultivating oneself. When an individual encounters barrier or frustration in the lifeworld due to his or her action, she or he may experience negative emotions and try to make efforts to control the external world. However, when his or her world-oriented reflection reveals that she or he is unable to overcome barriers in the external world, she or he has to seek actions that may restore the equilibrium between the actor and the external world.

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The most important Confucian rule of thumb for guiding one's own conduct is this: "When you do not realize what you want, you must turn inwards and examine yourself in every aspect." That is also the criterion for distinguishing a morally superior man (*junzi*) and a mean man (*xiaojen*). When one has exerted oneself but failed in interpersonal competition, she or he must turn inward rather than grumble against heaven and blame other people. Mencius fully understood that the actor's interpretation about the source of the barrier may determine his or her usage of emotional concepts; his or her interpretation about the experience of frustration may "cover" the occurrence of a particular kind of emotional experience. Therefore, just like other pre-Qin Confucianists, he requested his disciples to be a *junzi* and suggested, "That whereby the *junzi* (morally superior man) is distinguished from other men is what he preserves in his heart; namely, benevolence and propriety."

Normative Schemata

Because the norm of reciprocity is a universal rule for interpersonal interaction, Mencius asserted this: "He who loves others is constantly loved by them. He who respects others is constantly respected by them" (*The Works of Mencius,* Li Lau, II, Chapter 28). In case a man treats others in a perverse and unreasonable manner, Mencius suggested that the *junzi* in such a case will turn round upon himself. "I must have desired benevolence. I must have desired propriety. How should this happen to me?" When an individual takes world-oriented action, she or he may make subjective and intuitive interpretation on barriers in the external world. But when one is making action-oriented reflection, she or he has to reflect on the meaning of barriers in his or her own action context and think over the most appropriate way to overcome the barrier. As such, the normative schemata of some beliefs of morality and laws that have been acquired via cultural learning may become the regulatory system for guiding the actor's reflection. Therefore, Mencius emphasized that in interpersonal interaction (treating others), affectional expression (loving others), governance of the state (ruling others), or interpersonal competition, when one has not obtained the expected return for the accomplishment of one's most appropriate behavior, one should turn inward and examine oneself in terms of such normative schemata as benevolence, wisdom, politeness, etc. (*The Works of Mencius*, Li Lou, I, Chapter 4).

The Teaching of Forbearance

Since the expression of negative emotions may destroy psychosocial homeostasis, **forbearance** became a moral response learned in socialization in Chinese culture, which emphasizes the value of harmony. During the Yuan dynasty, Wu Liang wrote a book called *Rěn Jīng* (忍經, *Classic of Forbearance*), and Hsu Ming-Kui wrote *Quàn Rěn Bǎi Zhēn* (勸忍百箴*, One*

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Hundred Admonitions for Forbearance). It describes 100 episodes of *rén* (forbearance) by Zhang Gong-Yi in the Tang dynasty. Zhu Xi, a great Confucian master in the school of idealist philosophy during the Ming dynasty, wrote this in his work titled *Tóng Méng Xū Zhī* (童蒙須知, *Essential Teachings for Innocent Childhood*):

> All people as others' juniors should be generally yielding and speak in details with a gentle tone, not indulging in loud and empty talk or clamoring and teasing. Be submissive and docile so as not to spout opinions when father or a senior is lecturing or reproaching. Should seniors have unpremeditated errors in their examination or condemnation, do not refute them on the spot but forbear and keep quiet temporarily.[14]

Zhu Xi's concept of education reveals the importance of forbearance as a moral characteristic for the socialization of Confucian ethics in traditional Chinese society. Ho and Kang reviewed research on Chinese child-rearing practices and concluded that the core idea of Chinese parents for socialization of their children is to teach them how to restrain their tempers and not to fight with others.[15] In other words, the socialization process may influence the strategy a Chinese person adopts to cope with interpersonal conflicts.

Conclusion

As a virtue for self-cultivation in Confucian cultural tradition, forbearance is like a double-edged sword. On one hand, it may help an individual to get along with others harmoniously within either family or work where pre-Qin Confucian relative ethics of *wu lun* have been practiced by most group members. On the other hand, it may be detrimental to one's psychological as well as physical health in situations where the absolute ethics of three bonds (*san gang*) are enforced by the resource allocator authoritatively. Taking *self-exertion and putting oneself in the place of another* as its core ideas, Confucian theory of self-cultivation had been utilized to develop Naikan therapy and Morita therapy in Japan (Chapters 12 and 13, this volume), which were further modified into constructive living therapy in North America.[16] These therapies, which arose from Confucian principles and ideas, offer clients coping strategies to effectively engage with daily situations where an ideal outcome will result in behavioral attempts to repay the debt for what one has received from significant others and from society. In some ways, these Confucian principles can be at odds with the focus of autonomy, expression, and satisfaction of the individual in Western counseling and psychotherapy that can stand in the way of clients learning the satisfaction of serving others.[17]

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the differences between Western and Asian worldviews. How can you incorporate the Chinese worldview model of equilibrium into a Western model of psychotherapy?
2. Generally, psychologists and mental health professionals appear to recognize that mainstream counseling and psychotherapy is Eurocentric. What aspects of Asian healing traditions can be incorporated into Western counseling and psychotherapy to make it more global?
3. In what ways can Confucian principles of self-cultivation be used in clinical work?
4. Do you think that Asian healing traditions such as Confucianism ideas can be applied to non-Asian clients in clinical settings effectively?

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SUGGESTED READINGS

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This is the first English book that contains a series of culture-inclusive theories on Chinese psychology constructed on the presumption of relationalism.

Kleinman, A., & Lin, T. Y. (Eds.). (1981). *Normal and abnormal behavior in Chinese culture*. Holland, Netherlands: D. Reidel.

This collection of articles addresses various aspects of social behaviors and psychopathology in Chinese society.

Li, Y. Y. (1992). In search of equilibrium and harmony: On the basic value orientation of traditional Chinese peasants. In C. Nakane & C. Chiao (Eds.), *Home bound: Studies in East Asian society* (pp. 127–148). Hong Kong: The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies.

This chapter describes the Chinese worldview model of equilibrium for maintaining one's harmonious relationships with nature, society, and oneself.

Reynolds, D. K. (1995). *A handbook for constructive living*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

This is an action-based way of looking at the world that combines two Japanese psychotherapies: Naikan and Morita.

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