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With Introduction by Prof. Trappl on behalf of the Confucius Institute at the University of Vienna and Introduction by Prof. Klotzbücher on behalf of the Institute of East Asian studies, Sinology.

1. Chinese Psyche & Chinese Family.

Chinese mentality is a very complex structure influenced by several key aspects, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. However, since the 1960s, the generation who grew up then, did not learn about these traditions, they learned about Communism and Science. For the past thirty years, the main influence on the Chinese have been market economy. From this derives the term "*Socialism with a Chinese character*". In addition, there are several other traditions that strongly influences the Chinese mentality, like Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), healing practices, superstitions, other religions and other philosophies (including western philosophies and the experience of socialist campaigns). To understand his patients, this has created a very difficult situation for the psychotherapist.

Familism represents a very important aspect and a key to understanding Chinese mentality. Chinese culture is a high-context culture, where the family members are closely linked together, and they have to care for their family group. The concept of individualism is a foreign word to many Chinese.

The ideal for many Chinese to consider themselves successful is to honor their ancestors and their family legacy (光宗耀祖, guāngzōngyàozǔ). The highest happiness is represented by *four generations under one roof* (四世同堂, sì shī tóng táng). The Chinese government is proclaiming that the average Chinese family are changing towards *a relatively comfortable life* (小康, xiǎokāng). Nevertheless, the reality is that some are becoming extremely rich (高富师, gāofùshī), whereas the many poor are unable to benefit from this development. The current ideal family is that of the famous basketball player Yao Ming, successful and with one child.

The Chinese professor of Sociology, Fei Xiaotong said that the word for family, *jiā* (家) is the most elastic word in the Chinese vocabulary, and that its meaning depends on the context. The structure of the family is comparable to throwing a pebble into the water. A small family or clan will not have an extensive family, i.e. not produce many ripples, but a large and strong family would have a large, extended family i.e. producing a larger rippling effect.

The most important aspect of family is filial piety (孝, xiào). Children are obligated to perform duties without objections or complaints. The main objective is the continuation of the family lineage. To fulfill the dreams their parents never realized, is an important dynamic in a Chinese family.

Between 1949 and 1979, the familism lost its role and was replaced by collectivism, the collective intuitions; the communes in the countryside became the family. People said, "*We now have a large socialistic family, no need for small families any more*". In 1979, the second radical change happened, the market economy was introduced and, almost simultaneously, the one-child policy.

These changes forced the Chinese to become individuals in a competitive society, and the traditional family structure suddenly lost their functions. This change was introduced quickly, and did not leave the Chinese much time to adapt; this has been the cause of mental issues for many.

People lost their feeling of security, and traditional family support disappeared. Moreover, the past thirty years of support from the collective was lost during the decollectivisation era.

2. Characteristics of Family Life Cycle in China.

There are two theoretical frameworks, one from Erik Erickson; a life pyramid divided into 8 levels, from birth until old. The other from Jay Haley about a family life cycle: a young couple meet and fall in love, they get married and have children, and the children grow up and have children of their own. These two frameworks are very useful in quickly organizing a family. Every level has their own properties in Chinese society.

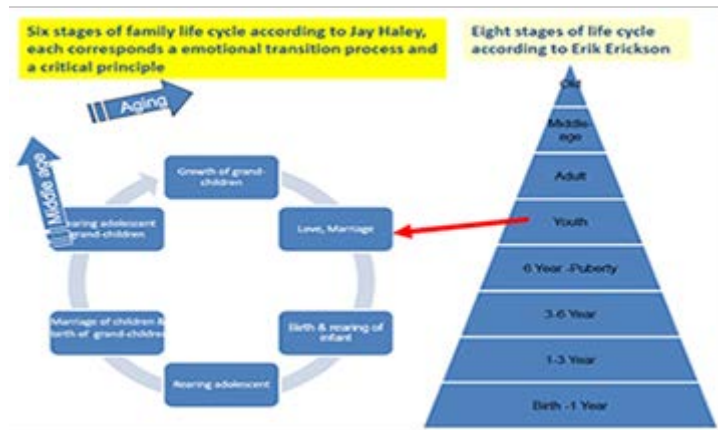


Fig.1: Family life cycle, Jay Haley and life pyramid by Erik Erickson (Source: Presentation slides of Zhao).

3. Introducing family therapy into China as a cultural project.

The systemic family therapy was introduced to China by two German psychiatrists, Helm Stierlin and Fritz B. Simon, through the "German-Chinese Symposia on Psychotherapy" in Kunming 1988. Before psychotherapy was virtually unknown, and many people were very skeptical. In 1994, Dr. Zhao Xudong opened his first psychotherapy center for family therapy in Kunming. This was the first of its kind in China. Dr. Zhao received financial support from the National Natural Science Foundation of China. This project included recording the sessions with 137 families, to analyze the potential benefit of employing family therapy into the Chinese society. The result was very positive. In several cases, this was like a miracle cure. Dr. Zhao could solve severe problems. In many cases, like anorexia, the treatment worked faster than at the Heidelberg University. Sometimes the patient only needed one or two sessions before normalizing their eating habits.

In China, the family has a strong influence on the patient. In some cases this can have a negative effect, but mostly it is positive for the patient. In the Chinese population today, there are several severe mental health issues. There was a study published in *The Lancet* in 2009, presenting the percentage of people with mental health issues in China. This study included the following categories: mood, anxiety, substance abuse, psychosis, organic and other disorders, with the exception of the category "personality & behavioral problems" where there is no available information. This is due to the fact that Chinese psychiatrists do not usually diagnose their patients with personality disturbances and behavioral problems. These kinds of disorders often appear in connection with family situations and the Chinese social system. Dr. Zhao found Western traditional family therapy very useful in treating these disturbances.

The high-speed development that is taking place in China is causing disturbances in people who feel that the pressure is too severe. The changes in the family structure, from the old clan structure to the nuclear family are now the norm. The clan family traditions have lost their importance, and only few people now can afford to support a large traditional family. Moreover, the law provides men and women with equal rights. However, 65 years after the first marriage law was introduced, many men

have not managed to adapt to this change. The result is that generational and value conflicts are common problems. According to the anthropologist Margaret Mead, this does only happen in societies which are changing too rapidly. In China, the older generation now has to learn from their children, and the young people do not show their elders the respect that is expected in a Confucian society.

In one example from Dr. Zhao's clinic, a daughter came to seek help for her ever-fighting parents, and her mother was suffering from depression. With the help of a family diagram, the daughter came to understand the underlying issues of having a mother coming from a "bad" bourgeois educated family and her father from a "good" simplistic uneducated family. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s it was quite common for a "bad" family to seek out a marriage partner from a "good" family, in an attempt to make their political background more correct. Because of the difference in their social niveau, this led to poor understanding of each other.

4. Outstanding issues in Chinese families.

One of the main concerns among Chinese is their feeling of uncertainty about the future. Parents who are permitted to have one child, develop concerns about failing as a parent, about the upbringing, nourishment and other health related issues. If they were permitted to have several children, it may have helped to reduce their fears. In the 1980s, scientists warned, that having only one child might cause the so-called Little Emperor Syndrome (小皇帝, xiǎo huángdì). This has become a reality, because every child has two parents and four grandparents. This is an upside-down pyramid. In May 2008, there was an article in *National Geographic*, stating that in thirty years the Chinese society will encounter a situation where a very limited workforce will have to support a large group of pensioners. The government is now debating the need for more children to be born.

In January 2013, *The Economist* (Cameron, et al., 2013) published a story regarding Little Emperors. Dr. Zhao, according to his own research, found this article to be too pessimistic in regarding the consequences for the 4-2-1 family structure. He published in *Science* in February 2013 a reply to this article (Zhao, et al., 2013), outlining his own findings, that in the population in general there has been a positive development in personality traits, better than in his own generation. According to Dr. Zhao, the research that was originally performed by Lisa Cameron and her team, was not focused enough, and that it was too overgeneralized. Dr. Zhao based this argument on his own study, having analyzed thirty thousand families in six different cities: Shanghai, Guangdong, Yunnan, Shaanxi (Xi'an), Liaoning (Shenyang) and Hubei (Wuhan). He and his team developed a scale (量表内容, liáng biǎo nèiróng) with four dimensions for evaluation: Family Logic (逻辑特征, luójí chí zhēng), emotional environment (情感气氛, qínggǎn qìfēn), level of individualism (个性化程度, gèxìng huà chéngdù) and mental health awareness (疾病观念, jíbìng huānniàn). In analyzing individuals born before and after the one-child policy, his results show improved figures in those born after the policy implementation. This result was the reverse of his original hypotheses.

Case: A successful businessperson came to the clinic as an identified patient; he was the "representative" of the family situation, but his wife was the one who was suffering the most. The mother of the wife had committed suicide, and they had a newborn daughter. The grandmother from the father side moved in with the family. This living arrangement caused the husband to develop headaches and anxiety. Every day at four o'clock he had heart rhythm disorder because he had to go home. The entire family was invited to the clinic, the therapy was devised with use of both medication and family- and individual therapy.

5. Working parents & substitutes.

In China there is widespread use of substitute parenting by grandparents or institutions. According to Zhao, this is a huge tragedy. In the Chinese countryside there are about sixty-two million children left behind. They are living with relatives, mainly grandparents, who in turn are left behind by the younger generation. This situation is terrible to the emotional development of the children. There are now about two hundred million migrant workers in China. According to the attachment theory, (Cooper, et al., 1998), there are several critical years in a child's development process. Particularly the first three years the parents are playing a very important role that will influence the whole life cycle of the child and its ability to form lasting bonds. Many Chinese parents are neglecting this responsibility. This also affects parents living in the cities. The pressure to make a career and earn money is forcing both parents to be absent.

6. Coping With Stress.

Many career people are living stressful lives which are further escalated by "bad" lifestyles. Negative to physical as well as mental health are, among other things, drug abuse and gambling. Common unethical behavior includes having at least one mistress or "second wife". The news often report on corrupt officials, abusing power and swindling money from the state. All this leads to mental health issues, e.g. fear being caught, fear of punishment or fear of private investigators hired by their wife.

7. "Cultural Shock" and Acculturative Stress Adaptation.

Many Chinese now spend long periods abroad, and many overseas Chinese are returning to China, students, workers, intellectuals 老海龟 (lǎo hǎiguī, as an old green turtle)¹ and people who has married intercultural. In the past twenty years, the population in Shanghai has doubled from twelve millions, to twenty four millions inhabitants last year.

Dr. Zhao treats several patients who has returned to China, mainly from America, Canada, Australia and the UK, but also from German speaking countries. Dr. Zhao's assistant has counted that in the past two years, he has treated sixty-three patients with difficulties in adapting. Almost every day this year, he is meeting with students that have experienced issues after returning home. There are about two-hundred and seventy thousand Chinese students in America alone, many of whom will experience problems adapting to life back home in China.

We are searching for normative explanations; in the 1970s, the German professor Helm Stierlin developed a "Delegation" theory that is applicative to the Chinese situation. This theory have five categories:

1) Over-expected and over-punished children.

Many children are being pushed by their parents or their extended family beyond their abilities, or contradictory to their interests.

¹ Originally, this it is a pun on words, 海 hai3 meaning; *overseas* and 龟 gui1 meaning; *turtle*, being a homophone of 归 gui1 means; *to return*.

- 2) Ambivalence due to conflicting expectations.
Parents do not know what they want their children to focus on, and keep changing their demands.
- 3) Ambivalence due to fighting separated or divorced parents.
The high number of divorced parents often cause great confusion in the child, if the parents have different opinions and demands.
- 4) Never-grown-up and Never-leave-home adults.
In China, many parents have too close and complicated relationship to their children. Overprotecting parents are telling their children that they are too weak, too sick and that they must stay at home and not leave to start their own life. This underdifferentiation ego can cause somatization. Chinese patients tend not to speak of mental health issues, but rather go to a general practitioner with physical symptoms. They will often reject the notion that they are suffering from mental disorders.
- 5) Feeling of Meaninglessness and confusion, young people who have loosened the relation to the close family. I.e. many individuals who are so-called left-behind children lack a sense of self-importance. They develop social problems. E.g. the Foxconn incident in Shenzhen, where a total of 18 employees who committed/attempted suicide between 2007 and 2013 where all left-behind children. The first group of individuals that grew up as left-behind children, are now adults.

Mao Dun's anti-theses has now has been expanded to include three core conflicts. The original theses was that people was pulled between loyalty to the family and loyalty to the emperor, and the concept of love was completely ignored. The conflict now is mainly between loyalty to the traditional family/clan and individual love and choice, and in some aspect, loyalty to the state.



Fig.2: Core conflicts (Source: Presentation slides of Zhao).

Sources:

Cameron, L., Erkal, N., Gangadharan, L. & Meng, X., 2013. Little Emperors: Behavioral Impacts of China's One-Child Policy. *Science*, 22 02.pp. 953-957.

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