

# Comparisons of Oriental and Western Approaches to Counseling and Guidance\*

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The differences in basic concepts between western and oriental approaches to counseling and psychotherapy examined in the paper are as follows : (1) While an individual is assumed to be self-contained in the western culture, a person is supposed to exist interrelationally with his or her environment and nature in the oriental culture. (2) Western psychotherapy is characterized by the dualistic view of mental functioning, i.e., unconsciousness and consciousness. On the other hand, in the oriental meditation the emphasis is on the developmental quality of "higher" consciousness. (3) While the aims of the western psychotherapy lie in the dimension of self-integration, those of the oriental approach lie in self-transcendence. (4) Western psychotherapeutic strategies concentrate on the knowing of psychic content of the patient's problem. In contrast, the approach based on the oriental culture would be more concerned with the apperception of relational context of the person. (5) While the methods of western psychotherapy are oriented to correct the person's problem, those of the oriental systems are oriented to enhance positive assets of the person.

The paper also proposes some desirable directions fitting in the oriental settings.

## 1. Introduction

Most of the current theories of personality development and of counseling are rooted in the west and have a strong Euro-American orientation of the individualistic model of man. The individualistic model of man is based on its premises that the goals of human activities are fundamentally personal and

individual and are to preserve the possibilities of personal fulfillment. The Freudian psychoanalysis as the foundation of western psychotherapy and counseling is perhaps an extreme reflection of the individualistic model of mankind.

Recently, it has been pointed out by some Asian practitioners that the western model of counseling is to some extent unfit to oriental culture (Munarriz, 1982 ; Shimizu, 1982 ; Lee, 1989). Most of their

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criticism is based on the argument that orientals are better understood in the context of their relationship with others rather than in terms of their individual ego functions. It is also recalled that, in the oriental culture, man has been regarded as a part of nature, while in the western culture man has been regarded as a power agent confronting nature. The different and somewhat contrasting views on man-nature relationship and individual vs. interrelational emphases naturally touch upon the necessity of an indigenous model of counseling and psychotherapeutic practices in oriental culture.

The present paper is one of the attempts to find out the cultural differences in basic concepts between oriental and western approaches to counseling and guidance including oriental meditation and western psychotherapy. The paper will also propose some desirable directions fitting in oriental settings which believed to be shared and further elaborated by Asian colleagues.

## 2. Differences in Basic Concepts

### (1) Self-contained individual vs. relational or communal individual

Western psychotherapy is envisioned by a particular perspective of human experiences which emphasizes man's individuality and his or her self-contained subjective world. A line between a region intrinsically belonging to the self and a region extrinsically belonging to others is firmly drawn. Thus, the "individual" implies an indivisible self.

In oriental culture, a person is not supposed to be an indivisible monad. A person exists interrelationally, not only with human environment but also with his or her natural and cosmic orders. Thus, the boundary of individual-nonindividual (self-nonself) is fluid and at least less sharply drawn than is in the west.

### (2) Unconsciousness-consciousness vs. developed consciousness

The western psychology may be characterized by the dualistic view of mental functioning: conscious ego and unconscious id, psychic and somatic, reason and instinct, cognition and affect. Freud believed that there could be no knowing, no control of human affairs, no science or art, without the opposition of the ego to the unconscious and of civilized order to nature. Thus, all that is distinctively human is against nature, even though they are inseparable from it (Watt, 1961).

In the oriental literature, there is no reference to unconscious dynamic as opposed to conscious processes. This was witnessed, for instance, by Guenther and Kawamura(1975) who translated a Tibetan Buddhist text of "The Necklace of Clear Understanding: An Elucidation of the Working Mind and Mental Events". To the oriental mind, consciousness may be conceived without an individual ego and deemed capable of transcending its ego condition. In other words, if the meditation reaches to the "higher" state of consciousness, the ego simply disappears and the duality of subject and object no longer exists. Thus, the "evolution" or development of consciousness is such that one makes from self-consciousness to nonself-consciousness, not simply from the unconscious self to the conscious self.

### (3) Self-integration vs. self-transcendence as the aim of counseling and guidance

From the foregoing comparison, it can be assumed by now that the aims of the western psychotherapy lie in the dimension of self-understanding, while the aims of the oriental approach lie in self-transcendence. That is, western approaches to relieve human sufferings are oriented toward the self-

integration, and oriental approaches are oriented toward the self—transcendence. This difference is succinctly recognized by Welwood(1980, p. 140) in his statement that the aim of psychotherapy is self—integration, while the aim of eastern meditation is self—transcendence. Viewing its aim of meditation as the attainment of “higher” consciousness, which is considered to be the transpersonal or cosmic state, one may question at this point whether or not the meditation is psychotherapy.

In regard to this controversy, one can simply observe that all those oriental modes of self—enlightenment, including Zen meditation and Yoga, attempt to give an answer to man’s existential problems. The orientals consider the human problems resulting from disruption of man’s primal harmony and unity with nature.

God or saint in the western culture is a symbol of power and harmony over man. In the oriental culture, God or saint is a being itself who is fulfilling man’s own power and harmony. Thus, approaches in religious modes are not regressive answers to the life problems as Freud might have thought. For those who have attained the state of higher states of consciousness and self—transcending enlightenment, the alleviation of individual problems becomes incidental. It is also recalled that one can observe a shrink sounding like a Guru and vice versa(Needleman, 1975).

#### (4) Psychic content vs. relational context

In the western psychotherapy, the roots of personal and emotional problems are generally considered to be located in the past and current psychic content which the patient is usually unaware of. The psychotherapist’s task is to foster self—knowledge of his or her own problems in the patient. The assumption of psychodynamic approach is, for instance, that prevailing effects of those problems

can be modified and mitigated through self—knowledge of and by decoding the symptoms.

In sum, psychoanalysis and most counseling strategies practised in the western world concentrate on “the knowing of psychic content” of the problems. In contrast, the approach based on the oriental culture would be more concerned with “the apperception of relational context” of both the problem and life orientation in general. Along with this line of comparative representation, it may be helpful to quote Kakar(1984) :

“Basically, the techniques would seek to connect (or reconnect) the person with sources of psychological strength available in his or her life situation and thus counteract the more or less conscious feelings of despair, shame, guilt, inferiority, confusion and isolation in which the disorder is embedded. The sources of human strength in the relational model lie in the integration of the person with his social and cosmic order”(p. 6).

The present author also shares experiences in India with the above—mentioned psychoanalyst ; it is not uncommon for family members to accompany with the client for the first interview and complain about the client’s “stubborn and unnatural” autonomy as one of the main problems. Also, they often complain that the client believes his or her own life and career is more important than concerns of the family. It may be assumed that in the oriental culture if the family is well, then the individual is well too, while in the western culture if the individual is in order, then automatically all must be well.

#### (5) Correction vs. enhancement

Following the above discussion, the methods and techniques of the oriental systems could also be expected to be different from those of western

systems. Russell(1986) introduced the concepts of uncovering vs. covering method to differentiate the techniques of western psychotherapy and oriental meditation. This distinction is, however, solely based on the criterion of whether or not the methods are designed to bring inner materials out of the unconscious. Certainly, any argument that meditation is a covering method is not in accord with the oriental systems. Some schools of meditation systems such as "mindful meditation" were rather categorized into the uncovering method(cf., Engler, 1984).

Therefore, the present author thinks that the concepts of "correction or alleviation of problems" vs. "enhancement of positive assets" are the distinctive features between the eastern and western approaches. In the eastern culture the individual can not be understood isolated from his or her environment. He or she can be understood only in the context of his or her interpersonal relationship and harmony with environment. Thus, the oriental method would take into consideration the client's capacities to be enhanced, as well as the disturbances of individual being. It is assumed that the negative internal conflicts and behavioral disorders do not necessarily exist, but the positive and regenerative assets in each person do.

Peseschkian(1984, p. 22) illustrated a similar point in describing the positive interpretation vs. traditional interpretation, some of which are as follows :

	traditional interpretation	positive interpretation
<anxiety>	unstable state, unable to cope with difficult situation	ability to avoid the threatening situation and objects
<fear of being alone>	inability to get along with oneself	marked need for a relationship with others

<depression>	sense of dejection, passive and secluded behavior	ability to react to situational and interpersonal conflicts with profound emotionality
<rebelliousness>	inability to conform	ability to say no, to oppose authority

Morita Therapy, founded by professor Morita in 1920's and now widely applied in Japan, also emphasizes in a similar vein the state of "Arugamama" as the mental attitude that the neurotic patient should take toward his symptoms. "Arugamama" is roughly translated as leaving the symptoms as they are and leading the life as it is. If the patient has acquired this state of attitude, he or she can be regarded as being on his or her way to recovery(Shimizu, 1982, p. 25).

In short, Morita Therapy can be characterized by its emphasis on self-elevation and self-development to be achieved by the patient's participation in productive daily activities.

### 3. Stages of an Oriental Model of Counseling as Illustrated in 'The Ten Oxherding Pictures(十牛圖)'

"The Ten Oxherding Pictures"(Kusan, 1985, pp. 153-171) illustrates the process of man's looking into his existential problems and reaching to the stage of self-enlightment. In the pictures, the ox symbolizes human problem(or unconscious self) and the man(herdboy) searching for the ox symbolizes human being trying to solve his problem.

(1) "Going out in search of the ox" : The first picture depicts a herdboy going out in the field to search for his ox. By metaphor, the man found

himself in trouble and started out to look for the solution.

(2) "Seeing the footprints" : As he goes out to search for the ox, he begins to notice that here and there are footprints of the ox. Now, his task is to follow these footprints. This represents the process of finding the clue to solve his problem.

(3) "Seeing the ox" : He continuously follows the tracks of the ox, and he finally catches sight of the outline of the ox. It means that he begins to confront his problem for the first time.

(4) "Catching the ox" : Now the nose of the ox is pierced. As the nature of the wild animal is hard to control, the man has yet to struggle with the ox. It represents the stage that the man struggles with his own problem, experiencing many conflicts.

(5) "Herding the ox" : The man has now learned to handle the ox in the right way. It can be compared to the process of working through the problem.

(6) "Riding the ox back home" : He can now ride the ox and even play the flute on its back. When the man solves his problem, everything seems to be in order as before the trouble.

(7) "Forgetting the ox, the man rests alone" : Forgetting what the trouble was, the man is now free and satisfied with himself. Most western psychotherapists consider this is the termination stage of counseling and psychotherapy. But it is not the end in oriental approach.

(8) "The ox and the man are both forgotten" : With the bygone trouble and himself altogether in oblivion, the man is sitting in silence and emptiness. This is finally the moment of awakening, beginning to fulfill himself as he is.

(9) "Returning to the original place" : The man has returned to the original place where he started. He finally recovers his very own treasure, i.e., true self. He recognizes that all of the exertions he put into the practice were actually unnecessary.

(10) "Appearing in the marketplace to teach and

transform" : At this last stage he is free to act in whatever way he sees fit in daily life. Whatever he does, it is helpful to others. In oriental approach this is considered to be the desirable end of counseling and psychotherapy.

#### 4. Emerging Trend toward an Indigenized Approach : A Suggestion for the Future Direction

Alan Watts(1961) mentioned that Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Hinduism are all psychotherapies in the western concepts, being neither religion nor philosophy. It is also noted that oriental meditation ('quiet mind therapy') is regarded as the highest reach for the psychotherapy by some western scholars(cf., M. Hammer, 1971).

The present author is not prepared to review here the indigenous practices of counseling and psychotherapy in the areas of folk remedies and philosophical or religious approaches in traditional forms. The following is therefore limited to rather a trend of some indigenized approaches currently emerged in our academic circles.

Rhee(1969) advocated that Tao(道) is the only way—out overcoming the crisis of the western civilization. He warned us explicitly not to simply imitate the western approaches to counseling and psychotherapy, but to firmly regain the subjective identity of our own based upon oriental culture. Thus, it might be assumed that Rhee is the forerunner in the search for an indigenized practices of counseling and psychotherapy in our country.

Following the lead of Rhee but in somewhat different line of reasoning, Yun(1975, 1983) presented a theory of his own that drew much attention in the circle of counseling practitioners and psychotherapists alike.

This paper will not go here into the details of his theory, but will simply mention only two of the basic tenets in his formulations : dialogic or transcendental attitude and enlightenment or actualization of the intrinsic human potential. According to Yun(1983), there are four kinds of attitudes : (1) "self-centered attitude" with which a person understands and reacts to the world on the basis of his or her own needs and thinking. (2) "other-centered attitude" with which a person understands and reacts to the world on the basis of opinions of others and introjected external elements. (3) "give-and-taking attitude" with which a person assesses, and reacts to, the world on the basis of functional utilities regardless of the being itself. (4) "dialogic or transcendental attitude" with which a person cares and respects the essence of being itself.

He also maintains that the goal of counseling and psychotherapy should be the enlightenment of the unique and real being of its own, i. e., becoming the true self. To him, adjustment to the human relation is a minor and by-product of counseling practices.

Meanwhile, there have been two rather controversial reactions in our circle to the effort of formulating indigenized model of counseling : (1) taking an universalistic stand, one reaction was such that mankind is basically equal and orientals are like others in the western world ; (2) taking a stand of cultural relativism, the other reaction was that any absolutist approach centered around essence or intrinsic nature of mankind would be short of counseling model to be practised upon.

From a standpoint of the latter, some of counseling psychologists and counselor educators began to express their own views(Lee, 1986 ; Lee, 1987).

Focusing on the methodological side, the present author(1987 ; 1989) recently has presented some suggestive views of his own right. They are summarized hereunder :

- (1) more emphasis on "educative dialogue" than "understanding dialogue"
- (2) integrational view rather than analytical approach
- (3) more emphasis on tolerance and acceptance than fulfillment and catharsis
- (4) reinforcing assets rather than correcting behaviors
- (5) regarding silence as acceptance or stage of already knowing rather than as resistance or not-knowing
- (6) more emphasis on value and ideological conflicts than adjustment and coping difficulties
- (7) enhancing social interest instead of encouraging self-introspection

Though of yet tentative nature, the above-mentioned suggestions are based on the present author's own experiences in the field and also derived from some of the key concepts for understanding contemporary Koreans(cf., Kim, 1979). The author likes to conclude the paper by just quoting an oriental wisdom which says as follows :

"If you give someone a fish, you feed him only once, if you teach him how to fish, he can feed himself forever."

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## 상담 지도 이론에 대한 동, 서양적 접근의 비교 연구

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본 고에서 검토된 상담과 심리치료에 대한 동, 서양적 접근들간의 기본 개념에 있어서의 차이점은 다음과 같다. (1) 서양 문화권에서 개인은 자기-내포적인 것으로 여겨지는 반면, 동양 문화권에서는 자신의 환경 및 자연과 상호 밀접한 관계를 맺으며 존재하는 것으로 간주된다. (2) 서양의 심리치료는 인간의 정신 기능에 관한 이원론적 관점(예를 들어, 무의식과 의식)으로 특징지어진다. 반면에, 동양의 명상에서는 “고차적” 의식 상태에 관한 발달적 특질이 강조된다. (3) 서양의 심리치료의 목적이 자기-통합적 차원에 관련된 것이라면, 동양적 접근의 목적은 자기-초월적 차원과 관련된다. (4) 서양의 심리치료 방략이 환자 문제의 정신적 내용을 아는 데 초점을 두는 것이라면, 동양 문화에 기초를 둔 접근은 한 개인의 관계적 맥락에 대한 완전한 이해를 더 증시한다. (5) 서양의 심리치료 방법들이 한 개인의 문제를 교정하는 데 중점을 두는 데 반해서, 동양적 체계의 방법들은 한 개인의 긍정적 측면을 고양시키는 데 관심을 둔다.

또한, 본 고에서는 동양적 장면에 알맞는 몇 가지 바람직한 방향들을 제시할 것이다.