

Counseling Psychology Training of Chinese Expatriate Students in the US

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### Abstract

A qualitative study was conducted with 12 respondents who understand many aspects of Chinese culture and have counseling experiences with Chinese clients or teaching in the American counseling psychology training program. This study aims to explore how American counseling psychology programs can better equip Chinese expatriate students to do effective therapy with Chinese clients. Toward that goal, the respondents identified the following : (a) the advantages of American counseling psychology programs to equip Chinese expatriate students to better serve Chinese clients; (b) the challenges that Chinese expatriate students encounter when working with Chinese clients; (c) the important components of equipping Chinese expatriate students during training; (d) and the ways that help Chinese expatriate students explore the most efficient approaches in serving Chinese clients and develop their own theoretical orientations based on existing Western theories. This study comprises not only a select few qualitative studies that specifically focus on Chinese expatriate students, but it is also one of the few conducts in Sinicizing counseling psychology training in the US (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Cook, Lei, & Chiang, 2010). In all, this study paves a practical, cultural, and academic way for American psychological programs to improve the learning experience and future career experiences of their Chinese expatriate students.

*Keywords:* Chinese expatriate students, psychological programs, the US

## Counseling Psychology Training of Chinese Expatriate Students in the US

### **Introduction**

Professional training systems have been widely applied in American psychotherapeutic practices; however, very few US universities offer curriculum specially designed for their Chinese expatriate students studying there. With the gradually increasing mental health problems among the Chinese population plus the shortage of educational resources in the field, more and more Chinese students choose to receive counseling training and get their practicing licenses in the US. Practical issues, however, in the clinical realm remain a challenge for the majority of them. While studying in the US gives Chinese expatriate students access to cutting edge psychological research and an opportunity to study and be trained in a mature, academic professional system, limitations still exist regarding current instructional designs to meet specific needs for the Chinese population. These limitations can appear more evident when Chinese expatriate students practice in clinics with clients from Chinese backgrounds. Specifically, there is a scarcity of US training programs designed for Chinese expatriate students who hope to work with Chinese clients, and there is a dearth of cultural sensitivity as it affects the curriculum design of US counseling psychology training.

If American counseling psychology programs hope to better equip Chinese expatriate students to do effective therapy with Chinese clients, US training programs should maximize their academic strengths to help students diminish potential practice obstacles by renovating a training model and adjusting training emphases to address Chinese cultural sensitivity. Moreover, the adjusted programs should aid Chinese expatriate students as they also deeply explore Chinese culture because it crucially influences their Chinese clients' minds and behavior. The training programs also should cultivate students' competence in developing their own

theoretical construction and counseling styles based on cultural sensitivity and well-designed, current research. Once students identify their own theoretical frames and design counseling styles tailored to their own personalities, worldviews, and cognition, they can more successfully apply Western psychological theories and techniques but in a Chinese context. Drawing on lessons learned through reviewing current literature and interviewing 12 respondents on topics regarding this research, this study identifies core elements, critical challenges, and practical strategies for American counseling psychology training programs so that they better train and equip their Chinese expatriate students for practice with Chinese clients.

### **Counseling Psychology Training in China**

China is experiencing a mental health crisis, with millions suffering from untreated mental illnesses and psychiatric disorders. In 2017 and according to the World Health Organization, 54 million Chinese have suffered from depression, representing 4.2 % of Chinese population (I-Ting, 2018, para. 2). Furthermore, The *Lancet*, a renowned medical journal, reported that approximately 173 million Chinese have been estimated to have diagnosable mental illnesses or psychiatric disorders (I-Ting, 2018, para. 3). However, only 15 million of them have sought treatment (I-Ting, 2018, para. 3). Chinese health practices and training programs have increased in the past several years, but their results are limited and controversial because very few Chinese universities offer curriculums in counseling or clinical psychology, and the majority of any of this training is through continuing education programs (Myler, & Hui, 2008, “The Status Of Mental Health Training In China,” para. 1). And in these programs, people need to complete only a three-month training in basic psychological and counseling and pass an examination, and then they can practice psychology via a certificate issued by the Chinese Ministry of Labor and Social Security (Lin, Jiang, & Duan, 2016, p. 26). Obviously, China currently needs to formulate

professional criteria for licensing its counselors and psychotherapists, but it also needs to require counselors to have earned a valid graduate degree in a counseling psychology training program from a credible university.

Although Chinese academics consistently argue the value of graduate training for the next generation of mental health practitioners, only a few Chinese graduate training programs in applied or professional psychology have been developed in the recent years (Duan et al., 2014; Hou, & Zhang, 2007; Liu, 2013). According to statistics, only about 100 active master's level training programs and no more than 10 doctoral programs exist in China (Lin, Jiang, & Duan, 2016, p. 26). Moreover, the vast majority of current trainers, faculty, and supervisors did not graduate from professionally accredited training institutions or obtain valid credentials and clinical experience (Hou, & Zhang, 2007, p. 39). Some programs not only lack sufficient training resources, they also fail to offer the basic core classes in counseling and clinical psychology (Hou, & Zhang, 2007; Lin, Jiang, & Duan, 2016). In addition, Chinese universities prefer to publish academic journals rather than design a high-quality psychological training model (Lin, Jiang, & Duan, 2016, p. 27). As a result, the current situation of Chinese psychological training programs sharply contrasts with the American educational ideal of emphasis on practicum and supervision.

To address the urgent issues related to the country's counseling psychology training model, the Chinese Ministry of Education holds national and international conferences to seek academic ways to promote applied psychology as a discipline. During these events, mental health professionals are invited to discuss the current status and strategies for Chinese psychological training programs, the more educational criteria of the discipline, the establishment of licensure examination within professional organizations, and information

communication. Simultaneously, the government also encourages people who want to practice psychology to go abroad to pursue their higher academic achievement in this field, in the hope that they will contribute their resulting knowledge and experience to help develop Chinese counseling psychology and its local practices.

### **Counseling Psychology Training in the US**

It is no doubt that America is one of the best countries in which Chinese expatriate students can study counseling psychology. America's educational system encourages hands-on research and spurs individual thinking and growth; additionally, US degrees and diplomas are recognized in almost all parts of the world ("Study psychology in the US," n.d., para. 8; 10). Moreover, studying in counseling and clinical psychology in the US is regarded as the supplement to the Chinese lack of educational resources and methods in the field.

Also, psychology as an academic field is derived from Western constructs. A US counseling model has developed into a mature system, and the master's degree as a necessary training and practice component of psychology was evident as early as in 1947 (Campbell, Worrell, Dailey, & Brown, 2018, p. 301). As many as 45 professional conferences and a considerable number of academic working groups determine the master's degree program's function and role in counseling psychology (Campbell, Worrell, Dailey, & Brown, 2018, p. 299). Moreover, the training standards and guidelines of the American Psychological Association emphasize cultural competence as essential in training models, but most training programs primarily teach the Western perspective even as they seek to develop students' multicultural orientation. In other words, the programs' main training objective is to aid US students who have been raised and educated in the States. Few US training programs are designed for non-American students (Marsella, 2012). When the author of this thesis collected thesis data using

keywords Chinese students, Psychotherapy Training, and the US, few relevant articles appeared, and no article referred to the Chinese expatriate students' US training in counseling psychology. This fact comes as no surprise because the only publication that offers Western educators culturally appropriate strategies and suggestions to equip Chinese student in the Chinese context is *Implications for Counselor Education Preparation and Distance Learning Instruction* by Cook, Lei, and Chiang. The publication is constructive regarding cultural sensitivity, but it focuses only on on-line training or long-distance education and lacks adequate instructions for in-class study. Therefore, further research will be helpful for US counseling psychology training programs so that they better equip Chinese expatriate students in the field.

Chinese expatriate students usually attend US psychological programs with other students who come from various cultural backgrounds. Although multicultural issues, even those relating to Chinese culture and techniques working with Chinese clients, are explored and discussed during training, these programs primarily aim to equip American students to do effective therapy with clients who come from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, the core values and principles that training models often heavily depend on are mainly considered in American context. However, a traditional US counseling psychology training model based only on American culture is not sufficient for Chinese expatriate students, especially for those who hope to practice in China after studying. In addition, much literature and recorded personal experiences show that Chinese counselors trained in the Western perspective can feel quite confused when they work with Chinese clients, even if both of them have a similar cultural background (Hwang, 2012; Hue, 2008). These and other investigations have evidenced that even with demonstrated awareness of multicultural and international guidelines, American universities generally lack the knowledge, experience, and supervision of counseling psychology training for Chinese expatriate

students to help them better serve Chinese clients.

### **The Present Study**

This study aims to explore how American counseling psychology programs can better equip Chinese expatriate students to do effective therapy with Chinese clients. The objectives of this study include (a) the advantages of American counseling psychology programs to equip Chinese expatriate students to better serve Chinese clients; (b) the challenges that Chinese expatriate students encounter when working with Chinese clients; (c) the important components of equipping Chinese expatriate students during training; (d) and the ways that help Chinese expatriate students to explore the most efficient approaches to serving Chinese clients and to develop their own theoretical orientation based on existing Western theories. Such an evaluation will also be helpful for counseling psychology training programs when they seek to better equip Chinese expatriate students in the US, and it serves as a direction for the development of Chinese mental health practices as well.

### **Method**

#### **Respondents and Procedures**

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with one intercultural expert, six licensed, practicing counselors or psychotherapists, and five licensed mental health counselor associates, all in the US. Some of the respondents are also university professors or psychiatrists working in hospitals. Given the nature of this study, the respondents were expected to understand Chinese culture, have counseling experience in working with Chinese clients, and/or have familiarity with American counseling psychology training. Except for one intercultural expert, the remaining 11 respondents had earned their psychology degrees in the US. Seven of them, however, were born and raised in China. Prior to the interviews, all respondents were given informed consent forms



to sign regarding the purpose of this study, the method of data analysis, and its range of research dissemination. Six respondents were interviewed for an average of 45 minutes, and they shared their experiences with and opinions about Chinese expatriate students' US counseling psychology education; six respondents chose an open written interview. The author of this thesis initially developed interview questions, and then the author's supervisor, Dr. Inslee, a Professor at Northwest University, finalized the questions. During the process, the author recorded interviews and later transcribed them, as were the written interviews, for analysis. The author of this thesis is a Chinese expatriate student pursuing a master's degree in counseling psychology at Northwest University, in Kirkland, Washington.

### **The Interview Questions**

The semi-structured interviews mainly explored the respondents' experiences of studying in the US and counseling with Chinese clients, and their opinions about Chinese expatriate students' counselling psychology training in the US. Their experiences refer to their US academic training, their resulting challenges when counseling Chinese clients, and their revised strategies used to apply Western techniques in Chinese contexts. In this study, the author encouraged the respondents to keep open minds and to contribute possibility assumptions regarding any adjustments of counseling program training models. Considering the respondents' professional backgrounds and cognitive maturity, the author categorized the interview questions in two sets.

#### **Questions for the experts in counseling psychology or Chinese culture:**

1. Compared with Chinese universities, what advantages do American universities offer that can help Chinese expatriate students better serve Chinese clients?
2. What do you think is most important for equipping Chinese expatriate students in

- American universities to be effective in counseling Chinese clients? What do you think is not as relevant in serving Chinese clients? Why?
3. What do you think is the biggest challenge for Chinese expatriate counselors in applying western psychology theories to counsel Chinese clients? What suggestions do you have in dealing with these challenges?
  4. What are effective ways for Chinese expatriate students to develop their own theoretical orientation, based on existing theories, to offer effective therapy to Chinese clients?
  5. In addition to the comprehensive study both of psychological theories and Chinese culture, what else do you think is also important to equip Chinese expatriate students to be effective in counseling Chinese clients?

**Questions for the beginning counselors and therapists:**

1. Why did you choose the US instead of China to study counseling psychology?
2. What have you learned from school that is important for you to counsel Chinese clients? What have you learned that is less important in counseling Chinese clients? Why?
3. What problems do you typically encounter when you provide counseling to Chinese clients? If so, what do you think caused these problems? If none, what helped you not run into any problems?
4. As a Chinese expatriate, what is your understanding of Chinese culture, as well as Chinese cognition and behavior? Can you describe it in detail with some examples?
5. How do you leverage your knowledge of Chinese culture in choosing psychological theories or techniques when providing counseling to Chinese clients?

6. In your actual work, have you tried to make any technical or strategic adjustments to existing theories to better serve Chinese clients? if so, what are they?
7. In addition to the Sinicization of psychological theories and the comprehensive study of Chinese culture, what else do you think is important for counselors to effectively serve Chinese clients?

Because this study tends to provide the American program references of equipping Chinese expatriate students rather than solutions of cultural conflicts, the qualitative interviews focus on proposing macro elements of training models. Because no incremental information could be gained in the latest three cases interviewed, interview results were regarded as saturated.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

The results were first classified into four categories: (a) American counseling psychology programs' advantages; (b) Chinese expatriate students' challenges in clinics; (c) the important components for equipping; (d) and the ways of seeking approaches and theoretical orientation. The respondents' answers were coded and categorized.

### **Results**

For clarity and succinctness, this study presents major findings according to four domains: American Program Advantages, Challenges in Practice, Most Important Components of Training, and Approaches and Theoretical Orientation Choice. Due to limited space, this thesis does not report findings that occur on a variant basis within the text.

#### **American Program Advantages**

##### **Better understanding of American psychological theories and practices.**

Twelve respondents who have an understanding of Chinese culture and experiences in

counseling Chinese clients or teaching in American counseling psychology programs were involved in this study, and all have agreed that it is a decided advantage for Chinese expatriate students to study counseling psychology in the US. However, they also have agreed that Chinese expatriate students need to better understand the counseling psychology practice and its philosophical foundations on which its theories are based. As one respondent, Ada Po Ha Mak, revealed, “Psychology was originated from Europe, in the beginning, and its objective of studying and serving was European. So, I think, the best context to learn the discipline is go back its source.” Likewise, another respondent, Dr. Forrest Inslee, also shared the following:

Chinese expat counselors need to be able to operate in an American context; if their Chinese clients are in the US, then it is likely that they have been acculturated to some extent, or certainly at the very least understand American culture context enough to understand Western psychology practices.... In China, their American training should help them to serve Chinese people who have embraced aspects of global culture which is mostly informed by Western ideas.

In brief, whether Chinese expatriate students will work in China or the US in the future, their study in the US will be beneficial to their theoretical understanding or practical application.

#### **Mature training model in the US.**

Respondents predominantly discussed positive perceptions of studying in the US, often in comparison with their perceptions of Chinese training. Mak said, “Psychology is originated from the Western. There are many conferences and working groups charged with determining the function and role of the training model in the US. They have developed a set of a mature training system. However, it is just getting started in China.” In other words, the counseling psychology training model in the US has had more opportunities than those in China. Consequently, it had

grown significantly in practice over the past few decades.

**Access to all research in psychology.**

Respondents agreed that the US offers access to more psychological sources than China does. For example, a respondent, Dr. Leihua Edstrom, explained, “They [US graduate programs] have access to all research on counseling, and they can teach students the best ways of working with clients that have been shown to work really well in research.” Also, students can be assured of the quality of American professors who use the latest research to improve themselves.

Another respondent, Dr. Elsa Hwee, also revealed, “I think being trained in the US where professors have a lot of access to all of the most current research and have been trained in the current research is helpful for graduate students to learn what works well, based on the research evidence.” In this case, Chinese expatriate students are able to use the best practices in working with clients. In addition, studying in the US, especially in American Psychological Association (APA) accredited training programs, allows students to learn from professors who teach from the latest research, which also ensures students a high quality of training.

**American ways of thinking of doing education.**

Because of its educational progress of psychological context, accessible research, and the maturity of its discipline development, American counseling psychology programs offer Chinese expatriate students advanced educational concepts and approaches and a competitive education system.

***Critical thinking.***

The Socratic critical thinking method informs American psychological education. Another respondent, Dr. Eric Dooley, described, “In America, culturally and academically, my professors expect me not always to agree with them and to be able to ask... We answer questions by asking

questions. In China, it is the complete opposite. I am a professor. I tell you, and you tell your students, and you tell your students....” Therefore, US students, including foreigners studying in the US, learn to challenge authority and to voice their own thoughts and opinions through the critical way of thinking encouraged in the US. As a result, new psychological theories or approaches are likely to emerge during this period of critically examining evidence and questioning data.

***Interactive learning.***

Different from one-way teaching in most Chinese universities, US training programs embody two-way communications between professors and students. For example, a respondent, Dr. Andy Ying, said, “Students who have an ethnic minority background (i.e. such as Chinese expatriate students in this case) can give input to classroom discussion to facilitate learning.” Dr. Hwee further shared, “[A] US college experience can offer academic rigor that develops analytical thinking and problem solving and healthy debate or discussion to learn how to evaluate theories and interventions.” US programs give Chinese expatriate students freedom to research, to have access to diverse points of view, to express their thoughts, and to form their own conclusions based on this access.

***Diverse perspectives.***

American training programs emphasize diversity for prospective counselors because they have a very US diverse population ranging from ethnicities to subcultures. A respondent, Jenny Dooley, explained, “[It is] helpful in that in American universities, you are going to get a lot of different perspectives on how to address problems not just... [that] one type of solution is going to serve everybody but that there are lots of different solutions to a problem.” Diverse perspectives are essential for Chinese expatriate students to customize unique treatment plans for clients,

especially for those who were born and raised in China, because China is a multi-ethnic country and ethnic cultures are still very different, even although they are all called Chinese. Meanwhile, the cognitive flexibility that comes with diverse perspectives may allow Chinese expatriate students to be more flexible in social choices and more respecting of different lifestyles and worldviews.

### **Challenges in Practice**

Respondents typically experienced challenges when applying class learned theories, approaches, and strategies to work with Chinese clients in clinical work. These challenges mainly derive from American and Chinese cultural differences. Another challenge comes from Chinese clients' often poor understanding of counseling psychology practices.

#### **Cultural difference.**

##### ***Individualism and collectivism.***

Americans are very individualistic. Chinese are very collective and family oriented. Psychological theories based on Western philosophy, then, often make therapy difficult when US trained therapists work with Chinese clients. Six respondents discussed their awareness of balancing individualism and collectivism during counseling. For example, a respondent, Shu Jin, said, "With Chinese clients, emphasizing individualism usually causes resistance." Another respondent, Jessica Lau, further shared similar experiences, "We need to be cognizant of not unintentionally defaulting to using Westernized standards as our lens during counseling sessions. The Western counseling framework often has roots in individualism that may feel countercultural to a Chinese client who comes from a collectivist background." Therefore, using only the Western framework may challenge therapy if the counseling theory contradicts a value that is important to Chinese clients.

##### ***Enmeshment and disengagement relationship in the family system.***

Western based psychological theories about mental illness and mental health can appear very different from the Chinese cognition. Therefore, knowing how to develop hypotheses about diagnosis and treatment based on these Western theories is undoubtedly another challenge for Chinese expatriate students when they work with Chinese clients. For example, one respondent, Yanjin Li, noted the following:

In Western society, people approve the individuals' independence and courage to pursue the life they want, but in Chinese culture, people do not approve this kind of value. So, in that case, if one person wants to detach from their family and wants to be themselves, they not only cannot obtain support from family but also from society, so they will be faced with pressure from themselves due to this unfamiliar lifestyle. Family or society both put pressure on them. So, if counselors push clients to be themselves, needless to say, the clients will feel more pressure than before. So, in Chinese culture, whether or not the enmeshment is unhealthy, I am not sure.

The same behavior may have completely different definitions under different cultural backgrounds, which makes it difficult for Chinese expatriate students trained in the US to use Western psychological standards to judge whether Chinese clients' behaviors are healthy or not.

***More pragmatism than idealism in Chinese culture.***

It is hard for Chinese counselors to develop a single theoretical orientation and follow it in clinical work. Jin explained, "Chinese culture is more pragmatism than idealism. Chinese people like to deal with problems in a practical way rather than using theory or abstract principle. For example, China's black cat, white cat diplomacy. Ex-president, Xiaoping Deng, once said that it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white as long as it catches mice." The small number of responses essentially communicated that no single theory or therapy seems to work well with



Chinese clients; it is necessary to explore a wider variety of useful techniques for the Chinese population through practice.

***Common language.***

Due to cultural differences, a lack of common language during counseling could also increase the difficulty of counseling. Mak shared the following:

It is also so hard to explain something to Chinese, such as grief. Westerners usually know what grief is, but most Chinese do not know about grief. They do not know that grief is a normal process when life changes, such as immigration. Immigration could cause a kind of grief. In Chinese culture, we do not use the word, Grief. It is part of a psychological language. So, I need to spend more time explaining something with Chinese clients or developing a set of common languages with them.

While there may be a lack of common language, counselors will also have to consider the different emotional expressions in different cultural backgrounds; counselors have to understand that different cultures can have different emotional responses to the same kind of events.

**Clients lack understanding of counseling.**

***Defining mental health.***

Chinese clients usually do not recognize the term or the fact of mental health. Lau said, “In Chinese culture, the focus is on academic and career performance, outward symbols of the self, and so internal wounds, such as mental health issues, may be neglected. Chinese individuals often focus more on how they appear to society, than what their internal emotions mean.”

Chinese clients usually lack the recognition of mental health. For example, they would like to pay a clinician a high fee for physical health but are not willing to pay the same to a counselor for mental health. They often hope to spend less money and shorter time on counseling. In

general, they do not think mental health is a life necessity. Chinese clients prefer to realize their own social functions over their mental health issues; or, it is possible that they may equate physical health with mental health.

### *Process of counseling.*

Understandably then, Chinese clients lack the awareness that they also need to join the counseling relationship. For example, Jin shared, “They came to the counseling room with the expectation on me to fix the problems or [that] the words I say can bring them enlightenment. Of course, I don’t have the magic to fix their problems or make them feel better without their taking their own responsibility.” In general, the majority of Chinese clients do not have even basic knowledge about counseling, and they suppose the counselor’s job is to give them suggestions which the clients should apply in daily life to solve their problems. They are not aware that they also need to join the counseling process.

### *The stereotype.*

Most Chinese clients think only psychotic people need counseling. They even feel ashamed of accepting counseling, and they experience a heavy psychological burden if they go to counselors. Li described, “In Chinese culture, counseling is a rare service for the majority of Chinese. It is an emerging industry in China. Many Chinese do not know what counseling is and do not accept the service. Most of the Chinese lack experience of understanding of counseling and accepting counseling. Many Chinese just associate counseling with stigma.” Chinese refer to people with mental health problems as psychotic. They even think depression and anxiety are imagined. They do not understand that depression and anxiety are associated with physiological problems caused by chemical changes in the body.

## **The Most Important Components of Training**

**Understand Chinese culture.**

*Understand Chinese Culture* refers here to studying cultural values and cultural practices. “Culture is learned, not innate. It derives from one’s social environment rather than from one’s genes” (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 6). Eight interviewees pointed out that if Chinese expatriate students want to better understand Chinese clients’ behavior, mindsets, and thoughts, they have to systematically study Chinese culture. To further explain, Dr. Edstrom expressed the following:

Students and all of us professors need to learn about different cultures, especially the culture of the population that we are working with so that we can integrate best counseling practices with ways of thinking and understanding of that cultural group. I think if we do not pay attention to our patients’ culture, then we are going to miss some really important things, and our counseling may not work and it actually, I think, might be harmful.

Moreover, counseling is a relationship. To build a good counseling relationship with clients, not only do Chinese expatriate students need to understand their clients’ culture, but they also need to explore their own cultural backgrounds. Some respondents also emphasized that understanding cultural differences between American and Chinese cultures and the impact of globalization on Chinese culture will help ensure successful counseling relationships as well.

**Knowledge and technical skills in counseling.**

To develop a personal style of counseling, Chinese expatriate students should study various counseling theories and techniques, know how to select wisely from them, and learn how to apply them in practice. As Mak succinctly explained, “You need to know counseling theories, then use them in practice, then you will find one that you are good at or you feel comfortable when applying.... You will know which theories fit Chinese clients through practice....” An

accurate, in-depth knowledge of the various theories and technical skills are the prerequisite to equip qualified counselors. Simply put, counselors cannot work well with clients using what they do not know. Moreover, they also need to work in counseling practice to help identify and improve their theories' fit with their clients' reality.

**Personal components of training.**

Respondents were typically concerned about the emphasis placed on students' personal growth, a study which includes exploring students' growth background, developing their self-insight, and cultivating their emotional maturity. This growth study, however, is key to their successful training.

***Explore their own growth background.***

Each counselor is a unique blend of early experiences and clinical training. The process of exploring growth background is the part of an inner growth journey advancing Chinese expatriate students into careers that are best for them. Li shared, "I think one of the most valuable knowledge is the vision educated by Northwest University that we are encouraged to explore our own growth background and experience." Training programs should focus on an exploration of the students' growth background. In a sense, it fosters students' skill to identify and work with various counselor-client relationships.

***Develop the competence of self-insight.***

Another essential part of becoming a counselor is the journey to self-insight in the face of our own limitations. Six respondents emphasized the self-reflection or self-awareness critical to equip counselors' personal growth. For example, Mak said, "I think a school should teach students to develop the competence of self-reflection. That is a key..... Most of the time, answers often come from our inside instead of outside." Dr. Ying contributed similar advocacy,

“My suggestions are [to] be thoughtful, be sensitive, and continue to accumulate work experiences with self-reflection.” Therefore, it is important for Chinese expatriate students to study to understand themselves and their own value, to adjust their own emotions and moods, and to make sense of their own ambitions and blind spots during the process of gaining self-insight.

*Cultivating students’ emotional maturity.*

As in most other professional careers, being a counselor involves mastering a large and ever-growing body of knowledge, learning a variety of skills, and navigating complex relationships (Cozolino, 2004, p. xv). However, unlike those in other professions, being a competent counselor requires simultaneous development of one’ emotional maturity, such as assessing emotional management, being empathic, building a good relationship with clients, and not judging. Seven participants revealed the importance of emotional maturity for successful therapy. For example, Dr. Dooley contributed the following:

The hurts we have in life happened because of a relationship. The healing experience in life happened because of our relationship. First of all, to be a good counselor, I need to work down myself. My best experience for counseling is not my masters and not my doctoral program. My best experience for counseling is with my clients. I have a client for two and a half years, very hard work, because I have to look at myself, feel my emotions, and think about my past. That...experience made me a good counselor.

Dooley further shared a similar experience: “I need to know theories. I need to be flexible about culture, but I need to be healed myself so that I can have a healing relationship with you.

Counseling is a relationship. Counseling is not what I do to you. Counseling is our relationship.” Because counselors have a graduate degree does not mean their therapy is successful. To be

successful, counselors have to take time, effort, and courage to improve their own emotional maturity. In other words, emotional maturity is the process by which counselors' inner worlds become bigger and it is the process by which counselors' perception, thinking, and tolerance of the world gradually increases as well.

### **Approaches and Theoretical Orientation Choice**

Getting practical experience in counseling and carefully experimenting, asking questions, trying out new ideas, getting adequate supervision, and discussing theories with others – all of these actions are helpful for Chinese expatriate students as they seek their own strategies and theoretical orientation.

#### **Based on current research.**

When asked how they would help students figure out effective intervention techniques and develop theoretical orientation, respondents typically thought it would be important to seek out sources that involve Chinese scholars and a more Chinese approach. Dr. Hwee stated the following:

Build on what has already been well researched, no need to re-invent the wheel. There are many Asian American scholars who have written and researched this area and many scholars (white, black, etc.) who have a sensitivity and intellectual prowess to also have wise insights about cultural differences.

Similarly, Dr. Andy Ying shared, "There is much existing research giving extensive information for culturally specific intervention theories and models." Chinese expatriate students should take full advantage of existing research and become more confident as they develop their own learning curves.

#### **Communitate with Chinese peers.**

Dr. Inslee said, “Chinese students should work, think, and risk together to explore more authentically Chinese ways of promoting mental health.” (Dr. Forrest Inslee, personal communication, February 4, 2019). Similarly, Li explained, “I have a peer consult group that consists of several Chinese expatriated counselors. One of the topics that we discuss a lot is how we adjust our counseling knowledge learning from America to better serve Chinese clients.” Chinese people have a collective component in their culture, and Chinese expatriate students’ unique worldviews are more likely to develop in community with other Chinese students and practitioners.

**Find a supervisor with rich experience of working with Chinese clients.**

Often a supervisor with high cultural sensitivity can help facilitate clinical growth for Chinese expatriate students. For example, Dr. Inslee explained, “It would be important for Chinese students to be inspired by role models, and to actually see and interact with Chinese counselors and teachers who are doing things in a more authentically Chinese way, in combination with Western modes.” Therefore, consulting with counselors who have lots of experience with Chinese clients is helpful for Chinese expatriate students as they develop their own theoretical perspectives.

**Practice in real setting.**

Chinese expatriate students are being encouraged to step up and to assertively integrate classroom learning into clinical practices in real settings. For example, Li described, “Spend more time working with Chinese clients and get conclusions and experiences about which approach can adapt to Chinese clients or cannot and which is better than others to work well in Chinese culture.” As Mak earlier explained, “You will know which theories fit Chinese clients through practice. . . .” In short, the choice of approach and theoretical orientation is not random;

practice is the only way for Chinese expatriate students to develop successful ways to treat Chinese clients.

### **Critical thinking of Western psychology.**

Western psychology theories are Western, and as such, they are quite different from Chinese ways of thinking. Students should be aware of these differences and speak out about them. For example, Dr. Hwee revealed, “Don’t assume Western approaches are the only ones that work, strive to find the best of both worlds, look for ways to bridge the gap through research, discussion, and try them out in counseling.” Training programs should encourage Chinese expatriate students to maintain a critical attitude towards Western theories while developing their own theoretical orientations and cultural adaptation approaches to theoretical direction and cultural adaptation. In this process, programs should encourage students to seek the possibility of developing new theories and approaches as well.

### **Being flexible with psychological theories.**

According to Corey (2013), “No single theory is comprehensive enough to account for the complexities of human behavior” (p. 467). Students who are open to an integrative perspective will find that more than one theory plays a crucial role in their personal counseling approach. For example, Dooley said, “I think it is important to be yourself and not to worry so much about being the perfect counselor in terms of the theoretical orientation but really be comfortable being yourself and figuring out what you are good at. And sticking to that.” It is important to help students develop their own theoretical orientation, but that is not the main goal of counseling psychology training programs. Instead, programs should teach students to maintain a flexible understanding of various theories and approaches so that they can work successfully with clients.

## **Discussion**



This study represents not only a select few qualitative studies that specifically focus on Chinese expatriate students, but it is also one of the few conducts in Sinicizing counseling psychology program in the US (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Cook, Lei, & Chiang, 2010). Results show that to form an intact training model for Chinese expatriate students, American counseling psychology programs should use their current academic advantages to create a culturally supporting context for Chinese expatriate students. Moreover, with novel contribution, this study explores Chinese expatriate participants' subjective definitions and appraisals of challenges as they work with Chinese clients in practice. As a result, it informs and directs critical adjustments of American training programs. Specifically, the results demonstrate that while American psychological programs are superior in many ways for Chinese expatriate students, they should also strive to better help Chinese expatriate students diminish the conflicts between existing psychological theories and practical applications. Accordingly, these programs should design curriculum that specifically explore Chinese culture with the goal to scientifically reinforce students' understanding of Chinese behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Meanwhile, the programs should also help augment Chinese expatriate students' self-development as they complete the work. The study also provides specific strategies for Chinese expatriate students to seek effective interventions and develop their own theoretical orientation to better serve Chinese clients.

### **The Advantages of Studying in the US**

#### **Better understanding of psychological theories and practices.**

American counseling psychology training programs should realize their advantage of equipping Chinese expatriate students to do effective therapy with Chinese clients and fully expend these advantages during training. Results from this study show that there are four main

advantages to studying in the US, namely, better understanding American psychological theories and practices, the US mature, psychological training model itself, access to all research in psychology, and American ways of thinking of doing education. First, the respondents thought that students can better understand psychological theories and practices in the culturally contextualized environment, such as that US. Psychology originated from the Western perspective, and it is a science of studying human beings' minds, thoughts, and behaviors. However, because huge cultural discrepancies exist between Eastern and Western societies, it is hard for Chinese expatriate students to fully understand Western behavioral sciences and relative theories based on Western culture. Immerging into the American culture context to study, students can expect chances to connect, observe, and explore Western culture, and then better understand psychological theories. For example, by interacting with American people in reality, observing American ways of thinking and behaviors, and truly feeling the cultural value of the Western society, Chinese expatriate students can gain new cognitions for psychological theories they may have studied but not yet understood very well. They can also get opportunities to access Western psychology practices. Their studies will require them to take internships in preparation for being licensed counselors or to receive psychotherapy during training. Some courses might even ask students to participate in research about counseling practices by interviewing participants who work in the field or by visiting institutions to learn about their counseling services. All of these opportunities and experiences will contribute to the students' understanding about counseling practices. The more Chinese expatriate students understand Western psychological theories, the more likely they will become flexible both as they apply them and as they develop their own unique perspectives in practice.

### **Mature training model.**

The respondents also pointed out that compared with Chinese counseling or clinical psychology programs, the American training model is much more academically credible as well as mature. The American master's program was established in 1947 as an indispensable training and practice component of counseling psychology. Over the last 70 years, under the American Psychological Association's supervisor and direction, this program has grown steadily and has identified four main master's topics, (a) quality assurance and accreditation, (b) scope of practice, (c) regulation and licensure, and (d) marketplace and workforce (Campbell, Worrell, Dailey, & Brown, 2018, p. 299). Moreover, the first edition of *The Counseling Psychology Model Training Program* which early on served as a model or normative standard for counseling psychology was published in 1998 (Scheel, Stabb, Cohn, Duan, & Sauer, 2018, p. 7). It has developed its third edition, released in 2017, which guides the development and maintenance of US counseling psychology programs (Scheel, Stabb, Cohn, Duan, & Sauer, 2018, p. 8). In contrast, Chinese master's programs in clinical mental health fall far behind the American ones. According to Lin, Jiang, and Duan (2016), the first Chinese meeting about enhancing the quality and quantity of the country's masters' education of psychology and to promote clinical and counseling psychology professional practices was just held on July of 2016 (p. 27). Therefore, at present, because of its advanced research and academics, the American psychological training model can undoubtedly train more competent counselors in the clinical mental health field than can China.

#### **Access to cutting-edge information.**

America not only is a fore runner in counseling psychology, but it has always also been in the forefront in research ("Study Psychology in the US," n.d., para. 8). For people who seriously ask, "Why do Chinese expatriates study psychology in the US?", the study could provide them a

persuasive answer: in the US, both American professors and students can access current psychological research and gain cutting-edge information in the field to improve themselves and their practices. Indeed, US psychology professors typically have credible qualifications partly because they can access and teach based on the latest research evidence. The available research also means that Chinese expatriate students can take advantage of these resources in the preparation for their clinical work. In China, however, people's permission to visit the internet is limited via political consideration, particularly their access to some American websites. It is also likely that China does not release publication of American books or journals as quickly as they are released in the US. Even when released, they may be put aside because of China's censorship policy, import permission, intellectual property protections, rate of return, and so on.

#### **Critical thinking in education.**

At the same time, some respondents were also concerned that Chinese expatriate students would have a harder time working with more culturally Chinese people if they used Western techniques once they return to China after studying and earning their degrees. However, as in modern theories of globalization, in psychological studies, there is a continual process of interaction and integration among national economies, societies, and cultures. Scholars in counseling psychology have already gradually realized that the process of globalization on counseling is multidimensional, involving both acculturation and enculturation (Kim, & Abreu, 2001; Rothenberg, 2003). Because of it, American counseling programs are already aware of the dynamic interplay between Western and Chinese cultures rather than only the conflict between Western psychological theories and Chinese culture. However, being aware of the cultural difference is not enough to prepare Chinese expatriate students to return home to China and successfully treat Chinese clients. Considering the impact of globalization on counseling, US

training programs should provide Chinese expatriate students the academic and creative expertise to absorb, assimilate, and rebuild Western psychological theories so that they can use them in China. Specifically, US training programs also need to equip Chinese expatriate students' flexible ability to redefine traditional Western practices when Chinese clients may negatively react to them. Fortunately, the US education system has never lacked for ways to help students develop open minds and critical thinking. This study indicates that critical thinking, interactive learning, and diverse perspectives have led the American education system to become competitive and productive. Consequently, after learning Western-based practices, Chinese expatriate students are more likely to become flexible enough to challenge personal assumptions and broaden Chinese mental health intervention models.

### **Challenges in Practice**

#### **Cultural competence.**

The study shows that the respondents faced many challenges in practice when they served Chinese clients. These challenges result from American and Chinese cultural differences and Chinese clients' poor understanding of counseling psychology practices. It is necessary to identify the challenges and potential obstacles so as also to identify the insufficiency of the US current training model for Chinese expatriate students and to develop strategies to break through these challenges in training as well. Chinese expatriate students might assume that they can work well with Chinese clients since both of them come from similar culture background. That is not always true, however, because effective counseling depends on many factors beyond having similar cultural backgrounds. The level of acculturation of both counselors and clients, the common language, expectations about therapy, past experience of therapy, beliefs about mental health disorders, and personal fit – all of these play an important role in counseling (Myler, &

Hui, 2008, "Psychotherapy with Chinese American Clients in California," para. 2). It is worth noting that counselors who have similar cultural backgrounds with clients do not necessarily have better cultural competency than those counselors whose cultural background is different from their clients.

Results did not show that respondents who were born and raised in China were confused with applying Western theory with Chinese clients. The respondents were and are familiar with the Chinese clients' ways of communicating, behaving, and problem solving, and they also understand Chinese clients' cultural values. However, when they have been trained in Western literature and theories and have come to identify with the Western values underlying all these theories and models, their own cognition probably has become more anti-tradition rather than pro-tradition, as are their Chinese clients. They are easily caught in the conflict between themselves and Chinese clients in terms of perspectives rather than with the cultural tendency of Western theories themselves. To some extent during counseling counselors present themselves instead of psychological theories. The study also shows that the challenges respondents experience during counseling actually come from how well they balance the culture value between individualism and collectivism, how they define mental health, how they explore the common language between Western psychology and Chinese culture, and how they integrate Chinese elements into Western psychologically theoretical framework to develop new approaches or techniques that are appropriate for both Western and Chinese people.

The study also shows that it is difficult for respondents to determine an appropriate response when dealing with a different culture during the counseling process, especially when they have been trained to respect multiculturalism, defined as regarding diverse cultures and cultural identities as central values of counseling psychology. Current US training programs

seem to have become excessively sensitive to cultural difference. As a result, while Chinese expatriate students learn not to touch the high-voltage wire of the culture but to completely comply with their clients' cultural characteristics, this understanding of multicultural competence seems distorted. In practice, out of respect for cultural difference, students are trained to comply with the clients' cultural nature rather than to confront clients regarding specific cultural issues and help clients to acquire a new perspective in dealing with problems. Although a detailed discussion of Chinese culture and cultural adaptations of psychological theories is beyond the scope of this study, the following opinions of Chinese culture can serve as a foundation to help American training programs expand their views of addressing the incompatibility of Western techniques and Chinese culture.

Dreaming about freedom and being a self-centered human being comes from an animal instinct, and it is also the essence of individualism, the Western perspective. Confucianism, however, a relational theory, is the philosophical foundation of Chinese culture which deeply influences Chinese moral judgment, life goals, models of interpersonal relationship, and even ways of thinking and behavior (Hwang, 2012). However, Confucianism maintains that social stability is based on unequal relationships between people (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 80). Tracing the history of ancient China to 500 B.C., Confucianism has served as the tool that emperors have used to rule civilian society because its advocacy of hierarchy means subordinate people must obey superior people (Wang, & Madson, 2013). Confucianism had prevailed in China for thousands of years when the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. Although the first generation of leaders headed by Zedong Mao tried to wipe out Confucianism in China, his own rule actually contained strong Confucian elements (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 80). During Mao's reign, psychology, regarded as a negative

influence, was restricted because Mao though psychology emphasized individual differences instead of social cohesion (Thomason, & Qiong, 2008, p. 4). Since then, it has taken China a long time to gradually open to Western concepts of counseling psychology (Thomason, & Qiong, 2008, p. 4). Throughout history, China has suppressed “human nature,” or human rights that Westerners adhere to. Even now, the majority of Chinese people are not clear about what they really want to do, or they do not have a clear understanding of their own individual worth. For these historical reasons, the Chinese culture does not encourage self-understanding or self-awareness. Pursuing dreams regarding individual value and self-reflection is not a mainstream value in Chinese culture. Therefore, if counselors cannot dare to confront their Chinese clients’ culture and help them view their confusion from different perspectives, counseling will only proceed in an endless cycle without achieving real success.

#### **The spread of counseling.**

In Chinese culture, counseling, an emerging industry, is a rare service for most Chinese people. Many Chinese do not know what counseling is and do not accept the service; instead, they associate counseling with stigma. Because of this lack of cultural knowledge about counseling, Chinese counselors find it difficult to do effective therapy with Chinese clients. Consequently, China needs a psychoeducational spread to make the Chinese population aware of mental or psychological problems and to reduce the stigma they are subject to, but China also needs to push this field to develop at its governmental level and in a Chinese context. China is still a developing country, and it is unrealistic to expect it to reduce the negative beliefs about psychotherapy quickly, but it needs to start this process.

#### **Concerns under current training model.**

Respondents also discussed some concerns about counseling practice. These concerns are



common among Chinese expatriate students who have received training in Western psychology and who have consequently acculturated with the Western values underlying those Western theories and models. These “value changes” do not always fit their Chinese clients’ mindsets. While this gap is a problem, the Chinese expatriate respondents do not think that American universities will develop a tailored training plan for international students. For example, they have thought that the US programs consider any cultural gap as the practicing counselors’ responsibility, that those counselors should develop their own methods to address the complexity of traditional Chinese interpersonal-relationship dynamics instead of expecting the US training program to do so. Of particular note is most of the Chinese expatriate students do not know or understand some of the myriad of Chinese cultural values and practices. Specifically, they fail to understand the essence of the Chinese cultural phenomena, so their understanding of Chinese culture holds at a superficial level. For example, they only recognize that collectivism is a central characteristic in Chinese culture and that Chinese people prefer harmonious interpersonal relationships with a hierarchical structure, but they are unable to identify with the cultural values and daily practice underlying these phenomena. However, as the interviews progressed, it became apparent that most of respondents were thinking in Western perspectives without being aware of doing so. For example, they have come to expect that Chinese clients will show emotions just as Westerners do. The above concerns, then, do not actually derive from the interaction between counselors and Chinese clients, but come from the counselors’ self-awareness or self-reflection, or lack thereof. It is evident that with their US training based upon Western literature and theories, they have gradually acculturated with the Western values underlying all these theories and models. Moreover, in their narratives, they also tend to attribute their obstacle in practices to individual self-development, which this study will further explore

later.

### **Coping and Adjustment**

Identifications of challenges or concerns countered by Chinese expatriated students in practice provides this study a wonderful opportunity to explore new possibilities and approaches to psychology practice, which can also improve the US training programs' cultural adaption as it aims to better equip Chinese expatriate students to serve Chinese clients. The study shows Chinese Culture, Knowledge and Technical Skills, and Personal Components as the most three prominent factors that US programs should address. In addition, US training programs also need to teach the facts about Chinese cultural dynamics under the influence of globalization; at the same time, programs should emphasize that while European-American and Chinese languages, histories, culture, politics, and economics differ, human physical and mental structures are the same. Consequently, all human beings regardless of race have similar emotional and physical reactions when they face trauma or loss. Based on this knowledge, US programs should emphasize two fields of disciplines as opposed to the traditional counseling psychology model: first, Chinese culture and its dynamics under the impact of globalization; the second is neurosciences or biopsychology. The former is helpful in defining indicators of mental health in a Chinese context; the latter is helpful in defining common human characteristics. With these needs in mind, US programs should strive to help Chinese expatriate students integrate Chinese cultural elements with Western counseling psychology to further expand their roles in exploring Chinese-orientated therapy and finding effective approaches to equipping Chinese expatriate students to better serve Chinese clients.

#### **Chinese culture and cultural dynamic.**

##### ***Chinese culture.***

With respondents facing challenges and potential obstacles in practice, the study shows that US training programs should assist Chinese expatriate students in exploring Chinese culture so as to reinforce students' understanding of Chinese clients' behavior, thoughts, and feelings via a coherent, systematic, and scientific manner. First, numerous literatures mentions that regardless of approaches and theoretical orientation choice, therapeutic alliances between clients and counselors are known an integral and vital role in successful counseling (Horvath, Del Re, Flückiger, & Symonds, 2011; Escudero, Friedlander, Varela, & Abascal, 2008; Sharf, Primavera, & Diener, 2010). A good therapeutic alliance could provide a counselor better understanding of what clients are experiencing so that the counselors can design an effective treatment plan. Therapeutic alliance refers to the collaboration and trust relationship between counselors and clients, which greatly depends on counselors' cultural competence in cross-cultural clinical practices (Sprenkle, & Blow, 2004; Lee, 2011). Based on characteristics of counselors' cultural competency, as early as 1992, Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) developed a conceptual framework for competencies and standards in multicultural counseling by examining three dimensions, namely beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills (p. 481). However, while the majority of existing research has put much effort in elaborating the importance of knowledge and skill in counseling, researchers have not yet made counselors' beliefs and attitudes a focus for discussion. However, this study points to practical adjustments of counseling strategies that consider cultural differences between counselor and client. They are surely important issues to consider in adopting Western theories of counseling in a Chinese context. However, to become more effective and more competent in working with Chinese clients, counselors must be aware of their own beliefs and attitudes about the cultural values their clients hold. In addition, cultural competence emphasizes the importance of counselors' obtaining cultural knowledge

when working with culturally diverse clients, but it also means that counselors should not neglect cultural knowledge when they work with clients from their own cultural group.

Again, US trained Chinese expatriate students are supposed to be more effective in addressing cultural competence than are non-Chinese counselors when working with Chinese clients, but it is not always true. Misunderstanding, prejudice, and ignorance of culture and history exist not only between clients and counselors of different groups, but often are found the same group. “Some counselors are much more vulnerable to distortions and countertransference issues with clients from their own religious or racial group” (Cozolino, 2004, p. 63). In addition, “intra-group countertransference often goes emotionally deeper than inter-group prejudice” (Cozolino, 2004, p. 64). China, one of the world’s earliest civilizations, has existed more than 5,000 years. Today, it is the fourth largest country by total area, covering approximately 9,600,000 square kilometers; it has 56 ethnic groups and a population of around 1.404 billion (“China Population 2019, ” 2019). Massive population and a long history make Chinese culture greatly diversified and complicated. Obviously, studying Chinese culture, as varied as it is, becomes necessary not only for cross-culture counselors, but also for Chinese counselors who hope to understand Chinese clients by various cultural phenomenon. However, as noted earlier, Chinese cultures vary greatly and often are based on economic status, education, and degree of acculturation, as are subgroups within cultures (Cozolino, 2004, p. 62). Furthermore, each family embodies the broader culture in a unique way yet transmits it in personal and different ways to their children (Cozolino, 2004, p. 62). Without studying, no counselor can be an expert on cultural values in either Chinese beliefs or attitudes. Studying Chinese culture can also help students become aware of their own assumptions about Chinese clients’ behavior, values, and biases; uncover preconceived notions and personal limitations; and identify their feelings about

the inferiority and/or superiority of collectivism. They can better understand the main characteristics of the Chinese culture in which collectivism is still an important concept, and they can then develop and practice appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies for Chinese clients by exploring these cultural issues. At some time, Lau (2000) also pointed out that if counselors possess accurate cultural knowledge, they have a better frame of reference to understand their clients and to be more empathic toward them (p. 47). Further, through cultural competence, counselors can improve their own interest, concerns, and respect of the differences as they deepen their cultural knowledge. To become effective counselors, then, Chinese expatriate students need to discover their clients' cultural sense, and to do that, they need to have studied and grown to understand Chinese culture itself, enough of it so that they can see each clients' cultural embodiment.

The study has also indicated that empowerment and promotion of individual rights, on which most American counseling psychology programs and training models construct, cannot be adapted in a Chinese context because it might threaten the already established Chinese notion of social harmony (Yeung, & Ng, 2011, p. 293). Because of this threatening, beginning counselors or psychotherapists might choose to avoid the empowering concept during counseling. However, as counselors with cultural knowledge, they can trace the essential contradictions involved and define the social harmony advectioned by collectivism that comes at the expense of human rights and the establishment of social hierarchy. They could grow to own broader perspectives and think more deeply so as to design effective counseling interventions for their clients. In addition, Yeung and Ng (2011) point out that the collectivist cultures' acceptance of the status quo and their preferred strategies of non-intervention and inaction regarding negotiating authority, confrontation, and conflict are different from and should be distinguished from Chinese clients'

resistance against counselors during therapy (p. 286). With a deeper understanding of the complexity of Chinese culture, counselors are more likely to satisfy Chinese clients' underlying needs of a safe space during counseling practices. They will better understand that their clients face unique risks in regard to issues of power, shame, and confidentiality in a strictly Chinese context, risks that might further impede their Chinese clients who have originally hesitated to seek health services to access a therapeutic alliance.

*Cultural dynamic.*

Under the impact of Globalization, traditional Chinese culture is experiencing changes, as is the rest of the world, and perspectives about it. For instance, cross-cultural psychologists have condemned American psychological colonization regarding the meaning and treatment of mental illness worldwide. They also protested the spread of Western concepts of mental health because it was changing how symptoms were conceptualized and manifested in local-international communities (Lorelle, Byrd, & Crockett, 2012, p. 117). They also argued against the DSM (the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as the official word on mental disorders and counseling practices, research done by mental health professionals trained in the West and in the US in particular, and which has become the worldwide standard (Watters, 2010, p. 3). Indeed, further research also proves these concerns. For example, anorexia nervosa has presented differently in Hong Kong's clients (As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong shares the similar cultural background with China.) from the Western client's version prior to the early 1990's. Specifically, the Hong Kong clients displayed nonfat phobic anorexia, which means they exhibited the symptoms of restricted eating but did not express the symptom of fear of being overweight, as the Western version of the disorder showed (Watters, 2010, p. 18). On the other hand, however, some symptoms of mental

illnesses that were not present in the Western or American society are gradually coming to be popular in non-Western societies. For example, between 1998 and 2007, there was a significant increase in the number of cases that conformed to the traditionally Western fat phobic version of the disorder as compared to that in the previous decade, and the clinical presentation of eating disorders in Hong Kong has gradually conformed to the standards of an eating disorder in the DSM (Lee, Ng, Kwok, & Fung, 2010, p. 313).

It is worth noting that these trends should be attributed to the influence of globalization. The West's value systems, spread to diverse cultures, are creating a more homogenized world through globalization (Laungani, 2004, p. 202). Not only can the very presence of the Western values in the economic, social, and cultural spheres create new tensions for individuals to resolve, but these Western ideas of diagnosis have the potential to create altered expression of symptoms all over world (Lorelle, Byrd, & Crockett, 2012, p. 118). Moreover, the value of individualism has been introduced into China in many aspects, creating dual roles of individuality and community for Chinese people (Duan, & Wang, 2000; Iwasaki, 2005). In short, human thought, behavior, and feeling, influenced by culture, are always in dynamic process, so the fact of mental illness cannot be separated from culture (Watters, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, Chinese expatriate students not only need to study Chinese culture to ensure the efficacy of counseling with Chinese clients, but they also need to move beyond a traditionally Chinese perspective toward a global vision for the field.

**Knowledge and technical skills in counseling.**

***Professional language.***

To better serve Chinese clients, Chinese expatriate students should familiarize themselves with the major counseling approaches and theories of therapeutic practice and acquire counseling

styles tailored to their own personalities. Even although it is technically impossible for students to develop a competent counseling by merely completing a degree in counseling theory or approaches, the theoretical knowledge and techniques they gain from their academic studies will help students understand what they experience in practices, develop hypotheses about diagnosis and treatment, and generate ideas about what to do in counseling. There is a saying in Chinese that goes “know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat.” In other words, only if students sufficiently understand both Western theories and Chinese culture will they able to flexibly apply them in practice. They should also remember that if the Western principles and learning adapt well with Chinese clients, use them; otherwise, abandon them. In sum, an effective counselor should be very cautious both in modifying therapeutic strategies and also in defining needs according to the cultural background of the client.

*Neurosciences or biopsychology.*

Psychological struggles and mental illness know no cultural boundaries and not everything can be reduced to cultural differences (Cozolino, 2004, p. 63). Cultures are different, but human physiological structures are similar. Chinese people trend to shout down their emotions. In the Chinese culture, people learn to think without showing feelings. However, if humans want to be healthy, they need to feel and express their emotions. Healthy people need to be emotionally healthy as well as physically healthy. Therefore, it is essential that Chinese expatriates studying counseling psychology in the US understand this human health concept so that they can effectively serve Chinese clients. They must know the principle of neurosciences or biopsychology because regardless their cultural, ethnic, or religious background, people of any race or creed can be emotionally disturbed (Cozolino, 2004, p. 63).



Why are neurosciences or biopsychology important for counselors? As mentioned in the cultural competence section of this study, “Using self-esteem, independence, or happiness as indicators of mental health may negate the strengths of those who are more collectivistic in interpersonal relations” (Scheel, Stabb, Cohn, Duan, & Sauer, 2018, p. 21). Some cultural phenomena, such as enmeshment, are difficult to judge by Western psychological standards. Seen in a Chinese cultural context, it is difficult to ascertain whether these behaviors are healthy or not. In China, for example, parents are more likely to become excessively involved in their children’s lives; they make decisions, provide financial assistance, and even raise grandchildren for their children. Enmeshment, as a psychological term, refers to this culture phenomena which describes families whose personal boundaries are diffuse, whose sub-systems are undifferentiated, and who show over-concern for others which sometimes leads to those others’ loss of autonomous development as well (Goldberg, Stanton, & Goldenberg, 2016, p. 263). In Western society, people approve of an individuals’ independence and courage to pursue the life he or she wants, but in the Chinese culture, people do not approve of this individualistic value. Chinese people are educated to respect seniors and to comply with parents. In addition, Chinese culture awareness also leads to a phenomenon that Chinese people plan their lives based on family benefit, and they even regard marriage as part of the achievement of family social goals. Therefore, in order to survive, these children who must obey their parents’ command of everything are easily trapped in a state of pressure and dilemma. Regardless, more and more young Chinese people are living in an era that delicately interweaves Eastern and Western ideals, values, and norms with their traditional culture, and they are looking for anything possible to survive in this contradiction.

Enmeshment refers to cultural phenomenon, present even if counselors have adapted to

Chinese culture; they may find it hard to handle the cases involving a family relationship in a Chinese context. However, knowing and using the neurosciences or biopsychology can help counselors do effective therapy in this family situation. For example, counselors can allow the clients' body language to tell them whether clients feel stressful and troubled because of the non-boundary relationship with their parents. Counselors can start by helping them find physical ways to release stress (breathing practices, for instance) and then gradually teach them to build a boundary with their family. In time, clients will be able to form their new cognition to accept, respect, and even value their own existence as an individual and have the self-awareness to pay attention to their own needs.

### **Personal components of training.**

#### ***Self-development.***

The journey of becoming a counselor actually includes two simultaneous journeys: one outward into the professional world, and the other inward through the labyrinths of our own psyches (Cozolino, 2004, p. xv). Similarly, to better serve Chinese clients, Chinese expatriate students must improve not only their knowledge and technical skills in counseling, but also recognize their own judgment, empathy, and maturity. As mentioned earlier, most of the respondents attribute their obstacle in practices to individual self-development just as they strongly suggest that US training programs should help augment the students' self-development as they complete the work. Data analysis specifically names exploring self-growth backgrounds, enveloping self-insight, and cultivate emotional maturity as three critical aspects in term of this need for self-development. It is well known that training qualified psychological counselors is difficult and expensive. Despite that the counselors' personal growth is critical for successful psychotherapy, most US training programs focus on rote knowledge and technical skills; as a

result, most current training programs tend to provide a series of academic classes while ignoring the more challenging personal components of training (Cozolino, 2004, p. xviii). This study aims to counter this trend by advocating for more attention spent toward helping Chinese expatriate students, and all students involved, gain more personal insight so that they can become more successful psychotherapists.

Most US training programs teach a professional language and skill sets, and they provide the contacts students will need to begin their careers, but they do not excel at helping students to get to know themselves, a knowledge which is the key to being an excellent counselor (Cozolino, 2004, p. 195). A good way to begin students' self-development is to help them reflect on personal concerns from their own growth backgrounds. At the beginning, Professors should teach their students that everyone is influenced by their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and global viewpoints. On the macro level, students need to know the culture they are living in; on the micro level, they need to acknowledge their individual and family experiences. Therefore, there are two aspect points: first, students should have a better understanding of their own cultural backgrounds and how these cultural experiences have built their own biases, beliefs, and values. Sometimes, these factors will influence a counseling relationship. Second, the clients' biases, beliefs, and values also are influenced by their own cultural and growth backgrounds. When two people with different biases, beliefs, and values build a counseling relationship, they are likely to influence each other. However, getting to know each other's cultural backgrounds can help them create a positive relationship. Training programs, then, should encourage students to explore their own growth backgrounds and experiences and gain the expertise to observe their clients' personal values. Through this exploring, they will realize that each counseling relationship is unique. No one size fits all. Proper attention to these human, personal aspects will

aid counselors to design different approaches for different clients based on different situations.

The complication of this inner journey is inadequately addressed in most US training programs both for Chinese expatriate students and for all students involved, and that needs to change if these students eventually hope to be effective counselors. By remaining open to self-reflection, students not only expand their awareness of self but also build foundations for developing their abilities and skills as professionals. The person and the professional are intertwined facets that cannot be separated in reality. A study clinically and scientifically shows that counselors and clients who benefit from therapeutic alliance have much more effective therapy experiences than those using only counseling theories and strategies (Ardito, & Rabellino, 2011). Students can gain this self-insight in their training by participating in counseling or therapy. A view that counselors can benefit greatly from the experience of being clients themselves at some time is also supported by research (Corey, 2013, p. 21). Sometimes, self-exploration in one's growth background can increase their level of self-insight. This experience can be obtained anytime during training. Moreover, excellent psychologists also support the concept of personal insight as an important preparation in learning to counsel others (Pipher, 2003). Consequently, to some extent, US training programs should shift their concerns from teaching rote knowledge and technical skill to teaching students a process of self-development.

***Seek self-theoretical orientation and approaches.***

Counseling is a whirlpool of words and thoughts, feelings and needs, difficult realities and fantasies (Cozolino, 2004, p. 29). Chinese expatriate students who lack the experience of applying psychological theories to clinical practices easily become confused when facing complicated counseling relationship because applying what they have learned in the classroom to

their work with clients often required totally different skill sets. The individualism tendency of Western theories and clients' collectivist cultural background make applying Western theory in clinical Chinese situations difficult. Therefore, to meet these challenges, it is imperative that US programs help Chinese expatriate students develop clear theoretical orientations and also find effective personal and professional approaches to working with their Chinese clients.

Self-development for both counselor and client is possible during the process of successful therapy through experiencing, understanding, and regulating emotions. To some extent, the counselors' self-development plus their seeking appropriate theoretical orientations and approaches become the process of interaction, because a new way of thinking about the self, clients, and world will emerge during this exploration. Similarly, the process of forming the new way of thinking is itself a kind of self-reflection. In most cases, looking for theoretical orientations and approaches requires the counselor's integration of affect and cognition; however, the search is worth it because using effective theoretical orientations will greatly help counselors know what to say and what to do during counseling. Although there are hundreds of methods of therapeutic approaches, they can simply be grouped into the following four general categories: psychodynamic therapies, client-centered or existential-humanistic therapies, cognitive behavioral therapies, and family systems therapies. All of these theoretical orientations and approaches to therapy are designed to lessen suffering, reduce stressful symptoms, and increase clients' ability to cope with the stressors of life (Cozolino, 2004, p. 31). The only distinction among them is that they mobilize clients' feelings and cognition from different perspectives. For example, psychodynamic therapy explores the clients' past experiences; client-centered or existential-humanistic therapies focus on the meaning of life to clients; cognitive behavioral therapies seek the clients' negative self-assessment; and family systems therapies pay

more attention to the clients' relationship with others.

How do training programs help Chinese expatriate students seek self-theoretical orientation and approaches? The respondents contributed the following strategies: review current research; communicate with Chinese peers; find a supervisor with rich experience in working with Chinese clients; practice in real settings; use the critical thinking of western psychology; and be flexible with psychological theories. Respondents recommended that Chinese expatriate students step up and assertively integrate classroom learning with clinical practices in the real settings. Because of their universality, these theories can shed some light in clinical work with Chinese clients. Of course, Chinese expatriate students should beware of creating a melting pot in their clinical practices by assuming all materials are applicable to a particular population.

Chinese expatriate students are not always more culturally competent than non-Chinese counselors when working with Chinese clients, but compared with Western participants in mental health field, Chinese participants are more culturally competent when challenging the traditional training model or when Sinicizing the US counseling psychology training program. For example, when choosing approaches, counselors must choose a Chinese-orientated plan for Chinese clients under the current Chinese cultural context. In Chinese culture, people accept the concept of respecting authorities and obeying the authorities. Chinese students always believe what their teachers say, never doubt their teachers' words, and expect to follow their teachers' advice. Therefore, when Chinese clients regard psychological counselors as they do their teachers, the clients expect the counselors to offer suggestions to them. In fact, if Chinese clients want their counselors to tell them exactly what they should do to solve their problems or to deal with their emotions, then counselors do not have to be constrained by textbook training. They can counsel the clients with their own viewpoints. Duan and Wang (2000) assert that offering

advice to Chinese clients may not be a bad counseling practice because it is consistent with the hierarchical structure of Chinese culture (p. 15). That said, it can be a fine balance because while Chinese people living in a collectivistic society might depend on an expert authority, offering advice is not also more likely to reinforce such dependency (Lau, 2000, p. 48). Giving culturally appropriate advice can help the counselor serve the role of promoting social and group interests as well as individual interests, which may, in turn, gain the profession more social and cultural acceptance (Duan, & Wang, 2000, p. 15).

Similarly, if the US training program have enough courage and open mindedness to allow and encourage Chinese expatriate students to explore ways to practice that respect and adapt to Chinese culture and extend traditional Western approaches, these students will become more relevant and effective therapists not only for Chinese clients, but also in American practices as well. The success of Mindfulness Psychotherapy and Chinese Taoist Cognitive Psychotherapy provide strong evidence that Western theories and Chinese or Eastern culture can integrate well. According to the earliest source of literature, Mindfulness Psychotherapy comes from the Buddhist and was first officially introduced 2,600 years ago. Also, it is the most central form in primitive Buddhism. Mindfulness was introduced to the West in the 1970s and 1980s and was noted in the field of psychology. Gradually, it was improved and integrated as one of the most important concepts and techniques in contemporary psychotherapy (“A Brief History of Meditation,” n. d.). Chinese Taoist Cognitive Psychotherapy was developed by Chinese researchers who were searching for cultural adaptations of Cognitive Behavior Therapy to better fit with Chinese clients. They asserted the influence of Taoism on Chinese cognitive and coping styles and helped Chinese clients to achieve deep understanding of the philosophical tenets of psychotherapy, such as (a) to restrict selfish desires, to learn to be content, and to know when to

let go; (b) to be in harmony with others, to be humble, and to use softness to defeat hardness; and (c) to maintain tranquility, to act less, and to follow the laws of nature (Zhang et al., 2002).

Although training models from various approaches which include psychodynamic therapy, client-centered or existential-humanistic therapies, cognitive behavioral therapy, family systems therapies all present in the Chinese mental health training system, no well-designed research has produced conclusions regarding what approaches work best for Chinese clients (Chang, Tong, Shi, & Zeng, 2005; Myler, & Hui, 2008). While the study also shows respondents from an American background work to develop their theoretical orientations, Chinese counselors or psychotherapists do not use their studies in this way. It will require further research to determine whether the cultural conflict between Western psychological theories and Chinese culture is a hindrance in this process. It will take time to access the cultural adaptations to psychotherapy that are necessary to serve Chinese clients. The responsibility of this research belongs to Chinese psychologists, as well as to those in the US and around the world, to develop the system of psychotherapy that will better serve the Chinese population, and all populations, and contribute to an overall better understanding of human behavior. However, as the US training programs build for their future, they cannot wait for the evolution of a new theory; rather, they need to proceed now with what they know.

### **Implications**

The present study is the first attempt to explore how American counseling psychology training programs equip Chinese expatriate students to better serve Chinese clients. Much research contributes to their studies, teaches about cultural compatibility between Western theories and the Chinese population, and highlights the unique cultural phenomena in the Chinese context, but few studies focus on their perspectives on training program. On the one



hand, cultivating competent counselors is a long-term process which extends beyond the training program. On the other hand, a counselor's self-development as a key to successful psychotherapy is unlikely to be quantified and evaluated during training. The study tries move from the training programs' view and determine key points that can better equip students. Most US training programs teach cultural competence from the perspective that the counselor and clients come from different cultural backgrounds, but they trend to neglect that the intra-group differences can be greater than inter-group differences. American counseling training programs are in a unique position to address the described training and educational needs and can potentially influence the future direction of the counseling profession in the Chinese cultural context. The study also points out the American training programs' value to Chinese mental health projects, yet it also explores the training emphasis that Chinese expatriate students should forego their own worldviews as they adapt to Western mindsets. Because of this pro/con situation and with the increasing number of Chinese expatriate student trained in the US, it now possible, even necessary, to design an international curriculum for Chinese student in the US. As a result, this study presents a bold assumption and supplies constructive suggestions for that day's arrival.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

The study has several limitations. First, there is a limited number of respondents due mainly to a lack of specifically trained people to participate in it. Also, the majority of the study's respondents serve Chinese clients in the US, not in China. Even though Chinese clients living in the US have some of the cultural values of those living in China, their overall experience is affected by their degree of their acculturation, so their cognition and cultural values might be a little different from those of native Chinese. This fact might cause a different

counseling experience for these respondents when compared with counseling native Chinese. Second, it is possible that the author of this study also influenced what emerged during the interview. The author may prefer the Western values underlying all learned theories and models, which may have led the author to choose research questions with the author own biases and expectations. Third, because of the nature of the study, much of the research material and interview recordings were translated from Chinese to English. Although the author speaks Mandarin as well as English, the author has found it difficult to translate culturally bound language concepts and metaphors without losing their original contextual meaning.

### **Conclusion**

The study provides a comprehensive description of twelve respondents' perspectives on the advantages of American counseling psychology training programs, Chinese expatriate students' challenges under the present training model, imperative training constituents, and approaches' choice and theoretical orientations' development in practice. In all, the study paves a practical, cultural, and academic way for American psychological programs to improve the learning experience and future career experiences of their Chinese expatriate students.

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