

# Psychoanalysis in the Chinese Context

Psychoanalysis is no stranger in contemporary China, though discussion and practice were suppressed during the first decades of the People's Republic. Today it is once again established, both as a therapeutic speciality and as an approach to human nature and culture. Although 'psychoanalysis' is often listed under 'abnormal psychology' in the Chinese library system, the concepts of the unconscious, infantile sexuality, libido, and ego have gradually become part of the interpretive vocabulary of the educated public.

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The rise and fall and rise of psychoanalysis in China have been closely tied to political events. Freudianism (*Fuluoyide zhuyi*) attracted attention in China at about the same time that it was becoming popular in Europe, hard on the heels of Darwinism and Marxism, as part of a general explosion of Western ideas in China at the end of the Imperial period and the beginning of the new Republic in the first decades of the twentieth century. Chinese intellectuals wrote many introductory books and essays on psychoanalysis and translated half a dozen of Freud's main works, one even into elegant classical Chinese.

Before the 1949 revolution, Chinese writers and thinkers puzzling over the weaknesses of traditional society and struggling to remake culture in new ways found many fertile ideas in Freud's work. But Freud's most widespread and conspicuous influence was in literary criticism and in literature itself, and especially the literature of individualism and romance. Several leading writers such as Shen Congwen and Qian Zhongshu have acknowledged their debt to Freud. Almost all the leading intellectuals of the day, most notably the Zhou brothers (Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren) and Guo Moruo, used

and discussed psychoanalytic concepts in their works. Application of Freud's ideas extended even to the critical examination of ancient Chinese texts, for example in Wen Yiduo's discussion of sexual symbolism in the *Shi Jing* (Book of Songs). But as understanding of psychoanalysis was maturing, the attention of the nation was drawn to more immediately pressing issues: the Japanese invasion and the civil war.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, psychoanalysis was criticized as an element of bourgeois ideology. It understood problems on an individual scale; it seemed to indulge petty weaknesses. The Soviet-approved Pavlovian experimental psychology was a better fit for the scientific tone of official social doctrine, and became the leading model for the discipline of psychology in China. Only with the intellectual re-opening in the 1980s did psychoanalysis begin its revival. Especially the young found Freudian theory an exciting alternative to stale Marxist orthodoxy, though its focus on sex made psychoanalysis an easy target for the occasional campaigns against Western 'spiritual pollution', by which the old guard attempted to reassert some control over culture and thought.

Interest in psychoanalysis had revived by the mid-1980s, and many more works have now been translated, represent-

ing Freudian and other schools. Compared to the Republican period, there is today a greater focus on therapeutic practice, partly due to the growing general interest in psychotherapy in a rapidly changing society that puts increasing strain on individuals, and to the now regular exchanges between Chinese and Western psychologists. Conferences, training workshops, and treatment clinics have flourished.

Medical schools regularly offer training classes and workshops on psychotherapy and psychiatry run by Westerners. All major universities now offer therapeutic services for students, and there are telephone helplines such as the 'Women's Hotline', with varying reliance on psychoanalytic approaches (Gerlach 1999).

In China, as elsewhere in today's intercultural world, it is hard to find 'strict' Freudian clinical practice: a patient lying on a couch and free-associating for a largely silent doctor. Psychoanalysis itself has grown and changed, branching into many schools and becoming less dogmatic. The 'talking cure' is indeed emphasized, but in the form of conversations in which psychological theories tend to suggest ideas rather than dictate procedures and conclusions. Qian Mingyi, Professor of Psychology at Beijing University, says that she looks to all theories and uses whatever works, when she sees patients in the school clinic. Wang Haowei, a well-known psychotherapist in Taipei, says that he usually tells his patients a little more than what they are ready to accept, but not so much that they do not return.

The psychoanalytic scene in Taiwan is even more vibrant