

Special Issue: Sinops psychoanalysis

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PSYCHOANALYSIS

AND

HISTORY

INTRODUCTION: SINOPSYCHOANALYSIS

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Reports from the last ten years on the ‘discovery’ of psychoanalysis in China – whether excited or sceptical, and whether counting the onset from the pre-Tiananmen 1980s era of ‘Freud fever’, or (more frequently) the ‘explosion of professional and popular interests in psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and psychology in China’s major cities’ since the early 2000s (Huang and Kirsner, 2020, p. 3) – have been fraught with all the generic difficulties of conceiving ‘international’ psychoanalysis.

In the background, for one, is the perennial dispute over whether, and in what form, psychoanalysis presents a universal psychology, or at least a therapeutic technique capable of transcending local cultural dimensions. ‘Nowadays, we accept the universality of the psychoanalytic theory on the structure of the human mind,’ observed Anne-Marie Schlösser in 2009, reflecting on her experience of teaching psychodynamic psychotherapy to psychologists and psychiatrists on a two-year training programme in Shanghai, adding that ‘Chinese society will probably take over the theory of neurosis because the psyche seems to work on ubiquitous principles’ (Schlösser, 2009, pp. 223-4). By contrast, Antje Haag five years later emphasises the need for ‘transcultural discussion... in order to develop a deeper understanding of the structures of the human psyche as it is shaped by the different cultures’, and distinguishes western from eastern forms of self, noting that ‘the drama of Oedipus in western myth would not be imaginable in a Confucian society’ (Haag, 2014, pp. 21, p. 30).¹

¹ See also Scharff’s differentiation of the ‘Confucian-Taoist-Buddhist mentality and that derived from Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian ethics’ (Scharff, 2015, p. x).

But it is less this kind of debate – which once pitted Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* and Ernest Jones’s rebuttal of Malinowski against the counter-arguments of the Neo-Freudians concerning the cultural limits of the psychoanalytic paradigm – that has stoked the more recent rounds of controversy around China. China, as yet, seems rarely to have been credited with its own ability to generate and cultivate legitimate psychoanalysis (even as, notably, Huang and Kirsner have keenly observed, with regard to the many Chinese practitioners claiming a psychoanalytic identity by the mid-2000s, that ‘apparently, the kind of psychoanalysis imagined by these Chinese therapists was different from the one accepted by the international community’ (p. 8)). Rather, what has seemed most active and relevant is another more imperialistic facet of ‘universalisation’: the desire to transmit globally a particular model of psychoanalytic orthodoxy, pitched indubitably as ‘western’, in which the US and Europe are presented as ‘advanced’, and China is in need of catching up and positioned ‘mostly at the receiving end’ (Schlösser, 2009, p. 193; Kirsner and Snyder, 2009, p. 53; Huang and Kirsner, 2020, p. 14). In the same year that Schlösser observed cheerily, ‘Everyone is on the way to China’ (Schlösser, 2009, p. 219), Salman Akhtar noted wryly that, ‘the endangerment of psychoanalysis in the West has perhaps also propelled the burst of interest in remote outposts of the psychoanalytic regime’, so that ‘the “conquistador” spirit of Sigmund Freud [...] lives on, it seems’ (Akhtar, 2009, p. 2). Freud has gone down in popular history as remarking to Jung, upon their arrival in the US to give the Clark lectures in 1909, ‘Little do they know we are bringing them the plague’ – it is ironic then that 100 years later Americans and Europeans could present themselves so unproblematically as bearing eastwards the mental panacea for Chinese (post)modernity.

The turn of the millennium saw the start of a phase of psychoanalytic historiography in which many fresh accounts emerged, both of the complex geopolitical dimensions of international psychoanalysis and of the inception across the twentieth century of exceedingly diverse local psychoanalytic cultures (cf. Plotkin, 2001; Khanna, 2003; Damousi, 2005; Damousi and Plotkin, 2009; Rolnik, 2012; El Shakry, 2017; Forrester and Cameron, 2017). Yet there has been a disjunct between this account of global psychoanalysis – transcultural and decolonizing; approaching psychoanalysis ‘as a widely defined cultural phenomenon’ developing at multiple sites; refusing to accept ‘the existence of an orthodox version of psychoanalysis that could be used as a yardstick to define deviations and heterodoxies’ (Damousi and Plotkin, 2009, p. 4); and critical of ‘the outmoded nature of historical models that presuppose originals and bad copies’ (El Shakry, 2014, p. 89) – and the narratives which

have developed around China specifically. While Damousi and Plotkin noted the role of forced European immigration of the 1930s and 1940s in the very constitution of psychoanalysis in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia (p. 5), and sought appropriate methodological frameworks ‘to discuss circulation, fluidity, exchange and hybridity’ (2009, p. 6); and while El Shakry’s work on the ‘Arabic Freud’ attempted to rebut ‘the binary opposition between a western, liberating, and modern psychoanalysis and a local, traditional, and constraining Islam’ (Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab), and to show ‘definitively, that what counts as psychoanalysis could be – indeed was – just as well produced in decolonizing Cairo as in Vienna or New York’ (Dagmar Herzog); and while even more recently Stefania Pandolfo has articulated ‘the risk, and the violence, of concepts in translation,’ and interrogated ‘the responsibility of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists in a society deeply fractured and internally hollowed by ever growing inequalities and material and symbolic dispossessions’ (Pandolfo, 2018, p. 111, p. 122), the historiography on psychoanalysis in China, during the exact same period, has proceeded on far more conservative and to some extent market-oriented lines. It remains a puzzle as to why such arguments about transnational, polyvalent, radically generative psychoanalysis have been less generously extended to ‘Sinopschoanalysis’.

The way-stages in the development of Chinese psychoanalysis are conventionally given as follows: first, the republication and new translation of Freud texts during the post-Mao reform era of the 1980s, as part of a wave of interest in western intellectual culture. During the same period contact was established between German analysts and Chinese psychiatrists and psychologists leading to a German-Chinese Psychotherapy programme held episodically across sites in Beijing, Wuhan, Chengdu, and Shanghai, and eventually a more continuous psychodynamic operation from the later 1990s (from 2006 a similar Norwegian-led training emerged in Beijing with an off-shoot in Wuhan (Varvin and Gerlach, 2011; Huang and Kirsner, 2020, pp. 8-10)). The new millennium saw the emergence of the ‘psycho-boom’ proper (Huang, 2015, p. 1), including the launch of the certification for psychological counsellors by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (eventually accrediting around 1.2 million practitioners before the end of the programme in 2018), as well as the large-scale state funding of mental health projects as part of a wider package of health reform (Huang and Kirsner, 2020, pp. 3-8). A Psychoanalytic Association of China was founded in 2004; two years later the Government published a resolution aimed at establishing the ‘psychological harmony of the population’ as a political goal (Schlösser, 2009, p. 220). In

2008 Snyder set up the China American Psychoanalytic Alliance (CAPA), carrying out supervision, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis utilising Skype, and the IPA commenced a candidate training programme in Beijing, holding a landmark Asian Psychoanalytic Conference there with over 500 participants two years later (October 2010). In May 2013 the Chinese Government enacted its first national Mental Health Law (Huang and Kirsner, 2020, p. 11).

It is from the end of that first decade of the new millennium that most of the recent wave of history-writing on Chinese psychoanalysis and psychotherapy took off. But woven into such reports on the shifting status granted to mental health work, and the incrementally advancing presence of ‘western’ psychoanalysis in China, are a host of negative and reductive positionings of China: as not just ‘lagging’ behind the West in therapeutic work (all this during the ubiquitous western importation of eastern mindfulness practices, no less!) but also as locatable ‘in the ranks of the most mentally ill countries in the world’ (Osnos, 2011) – as if the country was itself a patient suffering from multiple historical traumas (rapid modernisation; the Cultural Revolution; the sudden arrival of forms of capitalism), but had now thankfully ‘opened up to many western ideas and technologies’ (Scharff, 2011, p. 191), as Freud had once dreamed of the opening up of his hysterical patient Irma to his new techniques. The Chinese audience for psychoanalysis has also typically been viewed in terms of cultural deficiencies or impasses which stand in the way of the successful transmission of therapeutic teachings: its ideal of harmony stymies the work ‘because of the lack of critical questions and feedback’; the ‘abstinent mindset of the analyst is hardly reconcilable with the Chinese culture of seeking and giving advice’, ‘the suppression of one’s own wishes and most definitely of any sexual drive is part of the standard mindset’ (Schlösser, 2009, pp. 221-222). The literature is rife with hackneyed descriptions of the enigma and obscurity (as if this was a property of the subjects themselves) – for Scharff writing in 2011 ‘we come to China almost as from another planet’, and ‘of all the countries in which I have taught, this culture is the most difficult to understand’ (p. 191) – and stereotypical presentations of the distinctiveness of East and West. Haag, for instance, while reflective and self-critical in some respects, nonetheless reinforces received ideas pitting shame against guilt culture, dependence versus independence, or an eastern propensity for identification and fusion against western unchanging individuality (2014, pp. 24, 22, 27). Finally the existence of Chinese psychoanalysis is frequently surrounded by intimations that it might be ‘impure’ or *ersatz*: ‘From the beginning of the twentieth century until the present, a “pure” form of

psychoanalysis was never introduced or received in China' (Kirsner and Snyder, 2009, p. 46). Schlösser's 2009 article, even carried a warning section-heading 'Chinese psychoanalysis: a fake copy?' (p. 222).

On what does this projection of an 'impure' psychoanalysis depend, other than a confusion of the historiography of psychoanalysis with the accreditation and recognition processes of particular professional institutions, such as the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), in the process ruling out large swathes of the practice of analysis in the Americas and elsewhere from the history of psychoanalysis? Many of the extant accounts of the last ten years have evidently been told from the perspective of particular western psychoanalytic organisations making inroads into China. Instructively, Kirsner and Snyder chart the existence of Chinese psychoanalysis by recording 'one IPA analyst in Beijing and an IPA training center' opened in October 2008 (p. 55), with 'more than thirty Chinese people... in analysis and twelve in psychotherapy' (p. 56). By 2020 this had expanded to seven IPA direct members and over 60 candidates in analytic training (Huang and Kirsner, 2020, p. 14): 'The professional core of the psychoanalytic movement in China', note Huang and Kirsner, translates as 'the small number of therapists who strive for the most advanced training', and who are thus making headway into the international world of institutionalized psychoanalysis' (p. 12). But however inadvertent the dismissive consequences, such accounts expressly excluded a whole variety of initiatives, developments and cross-fertilisations, as not 'official' psychoanalysis: Kirsner and Snyder mention in passing that 'A person in Chengdu who had had a partial analysis in Paris with a Lacanian analyst, was, under the auspices of the local Philosophical Association, "training" people to become psychoanalysts' (p. 55). The more recent Huang and Kirsner history acknowledges more up front that they describe 'the important actors and projects in the introduction of the broadly-defined Freudian tradition – the Lacanian group in Chengdu led by Huo Datong and the Jungian movement led by Shen Heyong, both of which have a history spanning over two decades, are thus omitted' (Huang and Kirsner, 2020, p. 14).²

² Though see Huang (2015) for a broader, more nuanced account in which such Lacanian and Jungian actors are included, and for its attempt to focus not merely on 'institutional domains, but also examine the permeation of psychotherapy into non-professional or popular spheres' (p. 3). Indeed, this article stands out for the way it is not invested in psychoanalysis at the expense of psychotherapy, and views the blurring of professional boundaries or labels more neutrally, recognising on the way that it was the psychotherapy trainings in particular that were flourishing as part of the psychoboom (p. 17).

Even the more questioning and critical Akhtar, who noted in 2009 the ‘Eurocentric base of the profession’s theory and personnel’ and their lukewarm ‘attitude toward the “Orientals”, regarding them as unsuitable for analytic treatment and/or training’ (p. 1) benchmarked the development of psychoanalysis in the Far East through the representation of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean individuals in the membership of the IPA and the American Psychoanalytic Association – the representation remaining, at that point, ‘insignificant’, though Akhtar also noted the recent emergence of ‘interest in exporting psychoanalysis to mainland China’ (p. 2) with the inception of the IPA China Committee and the founding of CAPA (for Huang and Kirsner ‘now widely accepted as another gold standard of training in China’, 2020, p. 10). Many of the histories arising from *within* the eastward movement, then, have had a stock-taking element, which conjures up western Institutes seeking to benefit from the alliance not only financially, but also in terms of the expansion of prestige as a psychoscience, as if China offered the way for psychoanalysis to become globally significant again.³ All of this has made for an at times tendentious and partial historical narrativization, although David Scharff’s editorials for the journal *Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in China* (note the more expansive title) issued from 2015 onwards have struck a significantly different tone – more concerned to be intercultural, to balance Chinese and western contributions and perspectives, and to be a ‘meeting place of cultures’ (Scharff, 2015, p. x).

This special issue on ‘Sinopsychoanalysis’ is devoted to key aspects of what has been so far left out, calling attention to some of the remarkable myriad of developments percolating ‘*alongside* the emerging, institutionalized psychoanalytic scenes in China’ (Lee, this issue). The essays showcased here are informed by the crucial provocations of preceding critical historiographic interventions: by Khanna on the colonialist contexts of ‘geopsychoanalysis’; by Damousi and Plotkin’s concern with ‘movements, flows, circulation and intersection of people, ideas and goods across political and cultural borders’ (2009, p. 4); by El Shakry’s tracing of ‘historical interactions, hybridizations, and interconnected webs of knowledge production between the Arab world and Europe’, and the ‘coproduction of psychoanalytic knowledge, across Egyptian and European knowledge formations’ (2014, p. 89, p. 96); and by Pandolfo’s situating of psychoanalysis within the shifting conflicts and intersections between scientific, medical, moral, metaphysical, juridical and spiritual discourses, and thus

³ As Schlösser saw it in 2009, ‘psychoanalysis in the West is fighting not just for recognition, but for its very existence’ (p. 219).

in relation to the broader ‘stakes of subjectivity and culture at a moment of questioning’ (2018, p. 35).⁴

The work in this issue makes several bold commitments to develop a fresh historiography for Sinops psychoanalysis. First, *to alter the position of China, from being the subject (in all the connotations of that word) to being a producer of that history and historiography, and of psychoanalysis* – shifting ‘the focus of historiographical attention from the reception to the production of psychoanalysis in unexpected locations’, as Chiang (this issue) observes, noting in addition (with a nod to the work of Homayounpour): ‘Like Iran, China can function as an engine of new imaginaries for psychoanalysis’. This itself necessitates *moving the analysis beyond an assumed binary of the West, facing its distant ‘Other’* – reversing the gaze on the position of China ‘within westerners as an elemental geo-political fantasy’ (Lee) and showing, for instance, how the research of Bingham Dai and Pow-Meng Yap, ‘called into question the construction of cultural Chineseness at the same time that it contested the universal legibility of western psychiatric theories’ (Chiang). The work also *moves away from a homogenizing and isolating summary of what China ‘is’* – hence Lee’s refusal of ‘monolithic “China talk” in any form that is ethnoculturally nationalized, essentialized, ideologized or even defensively mystified’ as being inadequate to exemplify the dynamic undercurrents of psychoanalytic discourses amongst people ‘whose lives are rooted in or supported through less official cultural, political and historical networks and trajectories’.⁵ This China is a ‘polyphonic, even polycentric, middle kingdom in the middle of becoming itself’. In addition the issue *moves China into the centre of the conversation*, as in Chiang’s aim ‘to shed light on the contribution of non-western actors and cultures to the transformation of psychoanalysis’, or Lee’s defining question: ‘What is (in) it for people in China, and across and beyond its great walls?’

Accompanying these goals there is the *need for new methodologies*. Wu, in addition to demonstrating the significant support Lacan gained for his project by reading Chinese

⁴ In addition see Pandolfo on the work of engaging the risk of alterity: ‘It is opened by the anthropological realization of the contingency and the limits of one’s conceptual tools in approaching what is perceived as the unfamiliarity of other forms of life’, whether expressed in coherent discourses, or in ‘the fragmented, painful, and sometimes original ways of inhabiting a world where none of the available vocabularies can be fully inhabited, even when they are invoked [...]’ (2018, p. 137).

⁵ See also Huang on the proliferation of local social scenes invested in the burgeoning psy-languages, connected through ‘numerous web-forums, chat rooms, and online communities specifically for people who were involved in the psycho-boom’ (2015, p. 17).

classics) experiments with ancient Chinese thought – even shattering its received image amongst Sinologists – by putting Confucius, Mencius and Laozi on the Lacanian couch, and in doing so resolves some ancient disputes and exposing the latent side of the Chinese unconscious. Alternatively, there is Chiang’s advocacy for a ‘transcultural style of reading’ in order to surpass the scientific framework of colonial psychiatry, and for biography as a tool for engaging ‘history from below’; and Kyoo Lee’s ‘conversing’ as a way of accessing ‘perspectival multiplicity and methodological indeterminacy... pragmatic syncretism and eclectic approaches’, tapping into the new collectivities emerging around psychoanalysis, but beyond the limits of official institutions. Equally, one must *enlarge the field of what is considered psychoanalytic tradition* – including also Wu’s and Lee’s Lacan, Chiang’s focus on Dai’s neo-Freudianism, as well as Winnicott, Kohut, Mitchell, Bion, and so on.⁶

Finally, in terms of new historiographic commitments, it seems necessary to acknowledge that the questions – not only about the use of psychoanalysis, but also about the multiple traumas of post-millennial existence – *are not to be posed merely towards the East, by the West, but apply to all globally.*⁷ The accounts of contemporary society in ‘rapid, turbulent, epochal transition on multiple fronts’ (Lee), or equally of a ‘spectacular society’, stirred up with ‘a fanatic craze of consumerism’ in which ‘the (diffuse) spectacle... has colonized all social terrains’ (Wu, 2020, pp. 630, 645), or of troubled selves struggling to learn how best to live in a postmodern consumer-capitalist dictatorship – are these not accounts of the West as well? Is this not also our societies in turmoil? And is not psychoanalysis in the process of reinvention everywhere?

Our section of tributes to the pioneering scholar of Chinese psychoanalytic thought and literary culture, Jingyuan Zhang, who died in 2020, offers luminous additional perspectives on the situation of ‘sinopsy(choanalysis) in the making’ (Lee). As Nick Bartlett puts it, her book *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Translations 1919-1949* (1992) beautifully demonstrated that ‘the work of translating psychoanalytic ideas is deeply shaped by fraught global histories of conflict and collaboration’. According to Hsuan-Ying Huang, the book also pointed out that ‘psychoanalysis was not transmitted as a coherent whole but in bits and pieces’. As in any country, news about the Freudian unconscious, sexuality, dreams,

⁶ For a recent commentary on Bion’s reception of Buddhist ideas, see Zhang (2019).

⁷ For brilliant contextualizations and analyses of developments in contemporary China, see the rich array of translations being continually added to the ‘Reading the China Dream’ website: <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/>.

therapeutic techniques, defence mechanisms, arrives piecemeal, is assimilated through ‘the translational efforts of local elites, a process contingent on social contexts’. And yet this dispersion, this interrupted rhythm of assimilation, equally gives rise to new synthetic acts, and new origins for psychoanalysis itself. The tributes (from Wendy Larson, Geoffrey Blowers, Nick Bartlett, Hsuan-Ying Huang, Howard Chiang and Philip Kafalas) place Zhang’s work at the juncture of a multitude of disciplines, intellectual modalities and cultural and scientific practices – including experimental psychology, literary criticism, anthropology, history of science, and group relations conferences – all of which testify to Zhang’s radiating influence, and to the complexity of the intersection of psychoanalysis with anywhere.

Is it now too paradoxical, too radical to propose that China *has long been* part of the history of psychoanalysis? Not just in the sense that to locate the ‘long history’ of the ‘Freudian unconscious’, the ‘Freudian psyche’, or the ‘Freudian subject’, must also entail tracing their possibilities back across the history of western metaphysics, therapeutic practices and the Judaeo-Christian traditions, which have themselves for many centuries been entangled in exchanges with, and translations and differentiations from, eastern culture – intellectually, practically, and of course at the level of fantasy. But isn’t there also a bigger point here: if psychoanalysis is to situate itself not just as a specific medical technique, but has also always made its pitch to be the new science of the soul, then aren’t the stakes higher here than the proponents of the eastward drive towards institutionalisation (whether through the IPA, or CAPA, or the Sino-German, and -Norwegian Programs) have made out? For must we not (if we are not Chinese) also learn *from* China what human culture is, what human subjectivity is, and therefore also what psychoanalysis is the science of? As Scharff acknowledged in 2015, ‘the introduction of psychoanalytic thought and practice into China will change analysis itself worldwide’ (p. x) – but not just our sense of what it will be; surely also our understanding of what it was.

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