



Short Paper

**Application of hypnosis in psychotherapy for the  
Chinese in Taiwan**

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**Abstract.** *The stereotyped impression held by the Chinese in Taiwan toward hypnosis is elaborated. Common psychological tendencies noticed among the Chinese patients are discussed, and associated with this, the special considerations needed for hypnosis is presented. Case examples are presented for the illustration. Finally, cultural comments are made regarding the application of hypnosis for the Chinese patients.*

**Key words:** hypnosis, psychotherapy, Chinese patients, Taiwan, culture.

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**INTRODUCTION** The practice of hypnosis was used by the western physicians in Europe since the end of Nineteen century. Later, the practice was gradually spread to the whole world including the East. Through the induction of hypnosis a person's conscious state will alter, fall into a trance state, and manifest different mental conditions permitting the clinician to explore the patient's depth psychology and to manipulate the inner emotion for therapeutic purpose. In order to investigate how the hypnosis will work for the Chinese patients, hypnosis has been tried for several patients in Taiwan. This report will explain how hypnosis works with the positive therapeutic effects on the Chinese. How to apply hypnosis for the Chinese patients will be discussed from cultural perspectives.

**CHINESE CULTURE AND HYPNOSIS** Chinese people in Taiwan usually hold the wrong view and misunderstand the mechanisms of hypnosis. They developed their image of hypnosis either from viewing the dramatic show of hypnosis performed on the stage, or the movie story which deals with evil manipulation of people's soul. Therefore, they regard hypnosis as some kind of mysterious magic and hold an unreasonable expectation of a miracle cure from hypnosis. In another way they regard hypnosis as an evil practice and too afraid to receive such a practice. It is unfair and unfortunate to hold these attitudes. Actually, based on modern psychological knowledge, hypnosis can be realized as a specific psychological intervention or operational skill for healing the mind. It has profound potential for utilization in the field of psychotherapy. However there is a need for careful explanation and assurance to the clients before the hypnosis is applied.

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It is worthwhile to point out that, within the Chinese society, the traditional *Qigong* of the Daoists and Zen meditation of the Buddhists, all involve the altered conscious state by developing hypnotic-like condition (Xu, 1994; Holroyd, 2003). If *Qigong* or Zen meditation is guided by the master for the students, it even becomes more similar to the induction of hypnosis by the therapist to the clients. For the practice of shamanism it involves the alternated conscious state and possession of the shaman, sometimes even the clients. It also seems hypnotic-like operation (Woodard, 2005). In another word, the practice of hypnosis is observed in the Eastern and Western traditional customs and it is a pan-culture phenomenon.

### **Common psychological tendency in Chinese patients and considerations for hypnosis**

From clinical experiences, it has been noticed that Chinese patients tend to manifest certain psychological tendencies. In spite of the fact that they do have intensive anxiety, they usually feel very shameful and reluctant to express their emotional complex, tend to suppress the existing emotional problems, and utilize indirect ways through intellectualization or somatization to deal with their feelings (Cheung *et al.*, 2005; Parker *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it is relatively difficult to establish the workable therapeutic relationship quickly within a short period of time and to work in ordinary ways of analysis and exploration of their intrapsychic complexes. Thus, for some patients, there is a need to rely on the practice of hypnosis as an adjunctive process to facilitate the progress of therapy.

Basically hypnosis can be regarded as a supplemental operation to the ordinary psychotherapy (Kirsch *et al.*, 1995). However, technically, there is no need to carry out formal hypnosis in traditional or conventional ways but it can be applied more flexibly and informally. Sometimes it can be carried out even without informing the patient that “hypnosis” is to be performed so that the patients won’t be scared by the hypnosis applied to them. If the patient is informed, then, careful explanation and assurance needs to be provided to eliminate the unnecessary fear, and clarify the incorrect expectation that the patient may have toward the hypnosis. However, hypnosis can be utilized as a supplement to the ordinary psychotherapy to overcome the psychological obstacles that the Chinese patients commonly have. It will help to establish workable therapeutic relationships and to manage the intrapsychic complex quickly.

## **CASE ILLUSTRATIONS**

### **Case 1**

A 29 year- old single female, college student, suffering from panic disorder with agoraphobia for three months, visited the clinic for treatment. Initially an anti-depressant (SSRI) was prescribed for two weeks to reduce the severity of the panic attacks. Psychotherapy was applied subsequently but the patient still manifested intense anxiety, poor concentration, and being shameful and reluctant to reveal the possible psychological problems that contribute to her panic attack. Since the ordinary talk therapy did not work smoothly, it was decided to apply hypnosis. Due to the concern that the patient might have a negative impression about the hypnosis, it was explained to the patient merely that “special” operation will be conducted to help the patient to be mentally relaxed and be able to recall the psychological trauma that she may have encountered. As a result, during her altered conscious state, the patient recalled an episode that she had experienced six months ago. Namely, she was hit by a car and fell down on the road. The person who hit her, a drunken man, held her and carried her to the road side to rescue her, but, at the same time asked her, in a threatening way, not to report the incident to the police. It was not only the physical injury of traffic accident, but the fear that

the drunken man might take advantage of her, which caused her panic condition. After the trauma was recalled, the patient was helped to re-experience the traumatic event in a more calm way to counteract her panic feeling. After eight sessions of hypnosis, the patient improved from her panic condition and became more comfortable to go outside without agoraphobia.

### **Case 2**

A 37 year-old married female, high school teacher, suffering from anxiety disorder and lack of self-confidence since she was young, was treated with anxiolytic medication and supportive therapy for more than ten years with unsatisfactory results. History revealed that she was born as an indigenous minority in the mountain area of Taiwan. When she was in elementary school, her parents sent her to live with her aunt in the plains area with the majority of Han Chinese for the purpose of receiving better education. Unfortunately she was discriminated and humiliated by her Chinese classmates at that time. With the speculation that she might have psychological trauma causing her anxiety, hypnosis was explained and suggested to her, and she accepted it. During the sessions, it was revealed that she had been teased by her classmates in the school because she was short with dark skin. The patient recalled that, once, her teacher asked her to stand up and introduce herself to her classmates, and she became very anxious, shameful and speechless, because she felt too embarrassed to reveal her minority background to her classmates. With encouragement from the therapist, the patient was asked to re-experience her traumatic situation with her present more mature adult ability. After eight sessions of hypnosis, her symptoms of anxiety diminished and her self-confidence improved.

### **Case 3**

A 41 year-old unmarried female, elementary school teacher who was raised by her parents with strict discipline and discriminatory treatment due to the favors of the boys over the girls. She developed the attitude of always being excessively serious, and expected too much from herself. Consequently, she suffered from chronic depression with problems of feeling inferior and had difficulty having intimate relations with others. She has received ordinary psychotherapy on and off since her age of 31. However, the result was not satisfactory because she had difficulty developing intimate relationship even with her therapist. Hypnosis was applied for the patient, encouraging her to be relaxed under trance state, trying role play on how to relate with others and imaging how to deal with matters in a less serious way. As a result, the patient became more comfortable to express herself and had more confidence in herself.

**CULTURAL COMMENTS** From the clinical experience, it is confirmed that the application of hypnosis during the process of psychotherapy, under the trance state, will certainly help the patient to diminish the anxiety, allow the expression of deep emotion, reduce the resistance associated with analytic work, and working on psychological trauma if it exists. It can help to deal with the common psychological obstacles noticed among the Chinese patients, namely feeling shameful and being reluctant to explore their emotional complex, sometimes particularly to the male therapists by the female patients. It will assist the patient to remove the suppression from the existing emotional problems, to face and deal with their deep emotion without intellectualization or somatization. But many Chinese patients still hold incorrect views about

hypnosis, therefore, it is recommended that careful explanation and clarification is necessary before such practice is applied.

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