

Short Paper

Daoistic cognitive psychotherapy: philosophical foundation and basic procedure

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Abstract. *The Daoistic cognitive therapy has been developed for the past one decade by the author in China as indigenous psychotherapy to suit the patients of Chinese culture. The philosophical foundation of the treatment will be elaborated by reviewing the Confucius thought and then the Daoistic philosophy respectively. Following this, the basic three-staged procedure of the treatment will be described.*

Key words: Daoism (or Taoism), Lao-zi (or Laotse), Confucius, philosophy, cognitive therapy, indigenous, psychotherapy, China.

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INTRODUCTION The development of an indigenous style of psychotherapy for Chinese to suit their cultural background is challenging work. The Daoistic cognitive psychotherapy has been developed in China by the author since one decade ago (Young, 1997). Theoretically, the therapy is based on the social coping and health keeping principles of Daoism philosophy extracted from *Daodejing*, a classic document written by Laozi in ancient time, about 25 centuries ago (Young *et al.*, 2002b). The Daoistic cognitive therapy has been applied clinically for the treatment of patients with neurotic (Zhang *et al.*, 2002) and psychosomatic disorders (Zhu *et al.*, 2005). The results have shown that through follow-up study, hundreds of cases treated by such therapy had promising effects in comparison with patients treated simply by drug therapy (Xiao *et al.*, 1998). Here, the philosophical foundation for the therapy will be elaborated and the basic procedure of the therapy will be presented.

PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND Traditionally, Confucianism is considered as the main, explicit, official philosophical base of the Chinese culture while Daoism (or Taoism) as the minor, subtle, complementary one.

Confucianism emphasizes ethics and morality. However, the registered items of doctrine and their explanations vary very much. Taking humanity as an example, several dozens of explanations could be found in Confucius Analects and other writings without the exact same meaning. Until the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Confucius school scholars still proposed the five rules of: "humanity, justice, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness," and eight virtues of: "loyalty, filial piety, humanity, love, faithfulness, justice, harmony, and fairness," and also four

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dimensions of: “propriety, justices, integrity, and the sense of shame”. Confucianism culture through education has exerted wide and deep influences on the formation of national characteristics and value orientation for the Chinese. Confucian scholars on the ways of conducting oneself in society accepted and held the following principles: social joining, trying to serve and govern the people, to be active and promising, and emphasizing an ethic of morality.

To summarize, principles in Confucianism for personal upstanding and social coping are: (a) To be well self-cultivated, well united with one’s own family members, run the country well and give the people peaceful and safe living; (b) Behave with humanity, justice, loyalty, and filial piety; (c) Set up noble aspirations from youth, enable the ancestors to feel glorious for your model behavior; (d) Behave as a saint internally, as a kind king externally; (e) Establish moral conduct and make meritorious contributions to the society; (f) To be strong, upright and promising.

In traditional Chinese culture there is another fascinating flower, the Daoism culture - with Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi as its outstanding representatives. Though the majority of historical rulers of China have supported and utilized Confucianism’s culture to attend to their purpose of maintaining the feudal patriarchal regime and the noble ruling position and proposed the rejection of different schools, and respect only Confucianism as the main thought of school, the Daoism school was highlighted now and then by its dialectic thinking, individual personality respect, detaching altitude (denial of the authority worship and hierarchy submission), and its doctrines of following nature philosophy. It set up its own banner among hundreds of schools of thought contention, like a crane stands among chickens. Toward the Confucianism school they pitted against each other on the one hand, and played a part together on the other hand.

Historically it was said that Confucius (as a young scholar) had met Lao Zi and asked for advice, but what they had discussed was not recorded in the historical literatures. However in the chapter 18 of *Dao De Jing* (the scripture of ethics) it proposed that “After the ban of major principles sponsored by sages, then benevolence and righteousness emerged; After the emergence of wisdom then there is enormous falsehood; When there is no peace within the family, filial piety and devotion arise; When the country is confused and in chaos, loyal ministers appear.” All these statements are directly against Confucian proposal of the meaning of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness in the governing of a country. In chapter 19 of the *Dao De Jing* it proposed continuously that: “Abandon sages and discard wisdom, then the people will benefit a hundred fold; Drop humanity, abandon justice, and the people will return to their natural affection; If there were discarding of profit and pretence (deceit) then there would be no robbers or thieves.” It expressed the negation idea of Lao Zi toward saint, wisdom, humanity, justice, pretence and profit. At the same time Lao Zi proposed: “Find plain background and hold simplistic elements, or back to plain and returning to simplicity, moderate desires and limit selfishness.” All of these showed a backward driving to the ancient ideology and obscurantist policy, and also played a complementary role to the Confucianism view of “model yourself after ancient kings,” and “admire the ancient customs.”

In *Dao De Jing*, Lao Zi claimed a series of fantastic thoughts: “The way of Heaven’s is to benefit and not to injure others, and the way of the sage is to act but not to compete” (Chapter 81). “To know when you have enough is to be immune from disgrace; To know when to stop is to be preserved from perils, only thus can you endure long” (Chapter 44). “No Misfortune is greater than that of discontentment, no crime is greater than that of ambition” (Chapter 46). “Self observation is not always clear, self opinionated is not always right, self important gets no merit, and self expansion causes no growth” (Chapter 24). “The greatest straight seems to be crooked, the greatest skill seems to be clumsy, and the greatest eloquence seems to be a stutter” (Chapter 45). “Those who know do not talk, those who talk do not know” (Chapter 56). “Your body (not your mind) has to make harmony with the population, in identification with, not escape from the dust

world” (Chapter 56). “If the sage would guide the people, he must serve them with humility; if he would lead them, he must follow behind” (Chapter 68). “The strongest come down forward, the weakest grows up forward” (Chapter 76). In certain circumstances, “The weak conquers the strong” (Chapter 36). “Knowing the masculine, keep yourself in the femininity state, to be the river under the highland; Knowing the purity and brightness, keep yourself in a dark and humiliated state, to be the valley of the mountain” (Chapter 28). “Dao invariably fakes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone” (Chapter 39). All the above statements are filled with the philosophy of life and dialectic thinking style.

In general, the Chinese were influenced spontaneously and simultaneously from multiple dimensions by their traditional culture. They accepted the culture of Confucianism when they were in their youth, while seeking for school knowledge and a job, seeking a position in society and in realization of their ideals, taking an attitude of within-society, productive and contributory value orientation. However, coming to their old age after retirement, when they confront with business failure, family breakage, suffering a terminal stage disease, meeting mental frustration in a terrible fix, when there is need of the reduction or getting rid of psychic pain, and also in time of seeking for urgent help for their crisis, they incline to accept the Daoism principle of social coping and health keeping, or become a follower of Buddhism or other religion, by adapting different copying strategies. In other words, if you are successful in your life, you adhere to Confucian thought; if you are not successful, you are more appreciative to Daoist thought.

EIGHT BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THERAPY GUIDE In order to carry out the Daoistic cognitive therapy, after examining the doctrine of Daoistic philosophy, the following eight basic principles, or slogans, are abstracted for application in therapy. They are:

1. Benefit without harm to yourself as well as to others

Only doing things beneficial to yourself and others, help others as a pleasure, don't be jealous to the success of others, never take pleasure at the misfortune of others. Don't make trouble with yourself, to your family members, and to others. Don't hate others, don't make many enemies, don't retaliate against others, don't expect others to be perfect.

2. Do your best without competition with others

Do your best and according to your capacity, without competition with others. In front of reward, financial gain, position, good opportunity, don't impose to get, don't implicate and compare with who won it justly. Don't strive to outshine others. Too clean a clothing is easily to be dirtied, too tall a tree is easily to be crashed by wind or thunder. Just due to your un-competition, so that nobody around would be able to compete with you.

3. Moderate desire and limit selfishness

Keep a vigorous spirit by limitation of desires, don't bother too much to cause mental exhaustion. The most ambitious and aggressive person always lets his/her body be driven by others, lets his mind be ruled by others. Busy all one's life and never aware of for what. The most selfish and desire-driven person always meets rejection by the society, so it is harmful to personal well-being and well social adaptation.

4. Know when to stop and learn how to be satisfied

The human desire may be higher even than heaven, so that there is no enduring satisfaction; on the other hand, the fortune of the majority of laymen is thinner than slim paper, so there is only consistent sorrow and suffering. A person who is

easily to be content and satisfied always enjoys him/herself. A person who learns when to stop never meets humiliation from others.

5. Knowing harmony and put one's self on a humble position

Be simple and easy to approach, treats others friendly, return others' misunderstanding and even hate with love and understanding, Keep harmony with others in your full effort. Don't behave arrogantly, don't look down others, don't consider oneself always in the right, don't try to manipulate others.

6. Hold softness to defeat hardness

Take drawing back as advancing, take defense as offense. Knowing brightness but remain in darkness, knowing masculine attitude but keep one's self on feminine style. Tolerate to un-justness and grievance, resistance to attack and maltreatment, Prepare in advance the worst result and strive for the best outcome.

7. Return to the initial purity and back to the original innocence

To be an honest person, always speak and behave honestly. Knowing others is wise, knowing one's self is a clear-minded person. Don't behave factiously and pretentious, don't act sentimentally and nervously, don't feel yourself inferior, unworthy and pitiful, don't blame everything and everybody without excuse.

8. Following the rule of nature

Doing things according to objective rules; select your life style following health keeping principles. Recognition of inevitable certainty and then in certain extent you may act freely. Never fight consistently with compulsive or obsessive symptoms, coexist with them peacefully. At the same time transfer your attention to other things which you enjoyed the most to find some moments of quietness and happiness.

BASIC PROCEDURE OF THERAPY Although the possibility and necessity of the application of Daoistic thought in psychotherapy had been emphasized by many Chinese scholars or others (Johnson & Kurtz, 1991), our work team (led by Derson Young) firstly developed a specific structured psychotherapy approach based on the combination of Daoism thought, *Taiji Quan* (soft or relaxing boxing), *Qigong* (meditation practice) on the one hand, and modern western cognitive psychotherapy, and Morita therapy on the other hand (Young *et al.*, 2002a). The treatment figures generally a comparative short (1 to 3 months) course for a group of patients, and the procedure is easy to carry out. This is important for a psychotherapeutic approach to be utilized by therapists in China who do not have much chance to get instructions from a supervisor and to be accepted by patients in China who do not expect much time and expense for therapy. Practically, the procedure can be divided into three stages. Each stage has its specified objective and is the foundation of the next stage. To maximize the efficacy of the treatment, the therapist must evaluate the objectives after each stage carefully.

Initial Stage

In this stage, the therapist needs to develop rapport with the patient as in any other psychotherapy. The therapist needs to understand the personality characteristics of the clients, their typical feelings, behavior patterns, cognitive deviations derived from their personality traits in coping with life events. After this, it is to introduce the whole treatment procedures with the introduction of Daoism stress coping and health keeping strategies. The Eight Principles for improvement of mental health will be introduced to the patients, namely: Benefit without harm to yourself as well as to others; Do your best without competition with others; Hold softness to

defeat the hardness; Know harmony and put oneself on a humble position; Know when to stop and know how to be satisfied; Moderate desires and limit selfishness; Return to the initial purity and back to the original innocence; and Follow the rule of nature. They are introduced in Chinese as slogans, as the Chinese are used to remember and follow things by slogans.

In this stage, the therapist also starts relaxation and meditation training, which consists of special exercises in a serial of styles of whole body slow movements which should persist until the patient can reduce his/her anxiety in daily life by these techniques.

Middle Stage

This stage includes two important steps, analysis of psychological causes of the emotional disorder, and cognitive behavioral modification based on the Eight Principles discussed previously. The first step is to help the patient to connect his/her disorder with his/her per-morbid personality and life events, and to invoke the idea of modifying his/her habitual thought, behavior and emotional response tendency. Subsequently cognitive behavioral modification is used technically for cognitive therapy. The therapist should utilize the technique to modify the personality traits, including thought, behavior and emotional response of the patient. The procedure should be carried out in context of a daily life event that caused anxiety to the patient previously. Any items of the Eight Principles should be internalized to construct new thought and behavior pattern of the patient to cope with every daily event. Generally, the modification training will last for 4 to 8 interviews.

Final Stage

The therapist is supposed to prepare for the termination of therapy in this stage. The therapist will examine the ability of the patient to utilize the new ways learned in the initial and middle stage to deal with his/her anxiety and life hassles in daily life (personal understanding record). In general, the coping ability and divergent approaches to common life stressors might be improved a lot by group discussion and cognitive reasoning, but not by hypnotic suggestion or simple imitation. After that, the therapy can be terminated.

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