

# Reflections on Transmutation to Traditional Chinese Culture and Localized Turn to Family Therapy Theory

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**Abstract:** Family therapy sprang up in the United States in the mid-20th century. It was introduced to China in the early 1980s and has now been commonly used in psychological counselling and therapy. Its therapeutic effects have a correlation with the localization of Western psychological culture and the transmutation of traditional Chinese culture.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Keywords:** Family therapy; Traditional culture; Localization

The modern family therapy movement, as the ‘fourth force’ in the history of modern psychological counselling and therapy, emerged in the United States in the 1940s. Most of the research at the time focused on schizophrenia, resulting in a series of key concepts: double bondage, bonding, separation and paraphilia, seemingly inseparable, mystification, and entangled pathology. By the 1960s and 1970s, psychodynamic, behaviourist and humanistic orientations dominated the world of counselling and psychotherapy. Today, it can be argued that family therapy has become a revolutionary psychotherapeutic technique that has taken over the world.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 1. The unique cultural genes and transitions of traditional Chinese culture

Cultural adaptability refers to those parts of Western family therapy philosophy that are compatible with traditional Chinese culture, i.e. those parts that can be ‘adapted’.<sup>[3]</sup> It is these parts that determine the value and significance of the application of family therapy in Chinese counselling and therapy. In order to address the issue of cultural adaptation, it is essential to fully understand the unique cultural DNA of traditional Chinese culture, as well as the changes and evolution of Chinese culture in recent decades.

### 1.1 Traditional Chinese culture and its expression in family relationships

The basic spirit of traditional Chinese culture is socially oriented, but at the same time family-oriented and with benevolence and love at its core.

### 1.2 The transformation of the traditional Chinese family orientation in modern society

The traditional Chinese concept of the family has always been family and socially oriented. The traditional character of the Chinese people is group-oriented and also other-oriented. This is distinctly different from the strong individual and self-orientation of Western culture.

### 1.3 The structure and functions of the Chinese family have tended to be simplified as the size of the family has become smaller

Family structure, also known as family type, is the basic pattern of family relations or the overall expression of family content.<sup>[4]</sup> Traditional Chinese family types include: the extended family consisting of three generations in the same household, the main and joint family, the monogamous family, and the paternal or conjugal family. However, modern urban China is generally dominated by the monogamous, one-child nuclear family. In the wider countryside, joint families with multiple generations living together predominate.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 1.4 The resolution of family conflicts is beginning to take on a democratic and legalistic orientation

The traditional Chinese family, with its inherited concept of the extended family and social orientation, tends to create intricate relationships between individuals in the traditional family, which is undoubtedly fertile ground for the brewing of various family conflicts.<sup>[6]</sup>

To sum up, Chinese family culture has undergone subversive changes in line with the progress of society and the development of the times. While maintaining the distinctive characteristics of traditional culture, it has also been influenced by Western culture and has emerged with some unique characteristics.

## 2. The localisation of family therapy theory from a multicultural perspective

Due to the characteristics of family therapy itself and the rapid development of family therapy in practice, more and more researchers of family therapy from different cultural backgrounds are required to explore family therapy based on a multicultural

perspective.

## **2.1 Philosophical hermeneutics has established the legitimacy of the localised turn in family therapy theory**

In the 20th century, the hermeneutic philosopher Gadamer proposed the concept of “fusion of horizons”: the so-called ontology exists in the interaction and mutual understanding between individuals, and a third party emerges from the interaction and mutual understanding.<sup>[7]</sup> Philosophical hermeneutics soon had an obvious impact on psychology. The transformation of the localisation of psychology under the hermeneutic horizon is not simply a search for the so-called native culture in its own original sense, because any native culture has already changed through the researcher’s interpretation. It is necessary to interpret and present a contemporary theory of family therapy based on a multicultural perspective with a modern, common cultural concept.

## **2.2 Reflection on therapeutic practice is the basis for the localised turn in family therapy theory and practice**

(1)The cultural pluralism turn in family therapy: influenced by the development of multiculturalism, some psychologists have begun to reflect on previous psychological research, for example, American psychologists argue that “the human psyche is differentiated by time, place and culture and is a historical product of history.” With the development of disciplines such as cultural psychiatry, many people are beginning to realise that the role of cultural factors needs to be fully considered when conducting family therapy, and it has become an urgent task to develop family therapy that is adapted to the cultural context of the country and its people.

(2)The localisation turn in family therapy in practice: The process of the emergence and development of multiculturalism has led some to argue that multiculturalism should be taken as a logical starting point and that indigenous psychology should be used as the basis for research in order to produce a psychology of universal significance.

## **3. Reflections on the local transformation of family therapy theory in China**

### **3.1 The process of localisation of psychology in China needs to be based on an adequate interpretation of traditional Chinese culture**

In a philosophical hermeneutic sense, it is not appropriate to conduct family therapy research in the Chinese cultural context by simply applying traditional Chinese culture or directly using traditional concepts to solve contemporary problems. The first step is to base oneself on a full understanding of contemporary psychological experiences and feelings, and to address current problems in the light of the distinctive vein of traditional culture. Therefore, if one wants to understand the psychological activities of individuals in the present, one must localise psychology within a historical and cultural coordinate system.

### **3.2 Family therapists need to be highly sensitive and conscious of their own unique cultural tendencies**

Because of the need to adapt to multiple cultures, family therapy itself requires Chinese family therapists to be highly culturally sensitive, to be able to accurately analyse and judge the different cultural backgrounds and cultural values of the therapeutic process, and to make targeted choices about family therapy theories and techniques. The choice of theories and techniques of family therapy should be tailored. A family therapist who is unaware of the cultural context in which he or she is working may have a negative impact on the therapy and may be culturally challenged in the therapy process, or may even fail in the therapy due to cultural blindness.

### **3.3 Family therapists should make good use of local traditional cultural resources**

Family therapy theories mainly come from the West, and due to the cultural differences between China and the West, it is only natural that family therapy theories introduced into China should encounter cultural conflicts. It is easy to ignore cultural conflicts and to adapt family therapy based on Western families to the relationships and rules of Chinese families.

### **3.4 Chinese family therapists need to work on the organic integration of Chinese and Western cultures in family therapy research**

Although Western family therapy has been introduced to China for nearly 40 years, its practical application in many areas of China is still in the exploratory stage. The level and depth of research in China is still far from adequate. In particular, the shortcomings that have emerged in the process of localising family therapy have not been well reflected upon and improved. Although scholars in Taiwan have conducted more research on the localisation of family therapy, they have also paid far less attention to cultural differences. To solve the problem of localisation of family therapy in China, it is necessary to grasp the fundamental aspects of traditional Chinese culture, make good use of theories and methods of family therapy imported from the West, base on the main elements of cultural conflicts in the process of localisation and actively seek effective solutions to resolve them.

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