

Psychodrama in Taiwan: Recent Developments and History

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Psychodrama has evolved significantly in Taiwan in the last forty years. At present, the method is being adapted to the needs of our culture. We are proceeding with research on culture-related theories. This may also have implications for the entrance of psychodrama in other countries in Asia.

KEYWORDS: Chinese culture; cross-cultural development; psychodrama; Taiwan.

Psychodrama was first introduced to Taiwan in 1974. It continued to develop and gained great popularity because the cathartic stage of psychodrama, as many Taiwanese psychodramatists contend, created a safe and trustworthy space for our people to reveal their innermost feelings and to confront problems in life.

In March 2010, we formed a national professional organization named the Taiwan Association of Psychodrama (TAP). As of August 2012, the association has about 80 registered members, most of whom are school teachers and counseling psychologists, followed in number by clinical psychologists and guidance teachers.

This article presents highlights of how psychodrama has emerged in Taiwan since 1974. Since a full history has many more names and references than could fit in this overview article, I encourage those readers who wish to read more details to find the supplement to this paper in my book scheduled for publication in 2013.

THE FOUR STAGES OF PSYCHODRAMA IN TAIWAN

In 1974, the year J. L. Moreno died, psychodrama was first introduced to Taiwan. It has since gone through vigorous development, which can be imagined as four stages:

- “Sowing the seeds.” From 1974 through 1987, psychodrama was mainly applied as a psychiatric method.

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- “Budding” happened from 1988 through 1993, when psychodrama expanded from hospitals to campuses and communities.
- “Blossoming” characterized our community’s growth from 1994 through 2004, during which foreign psychodramatists started long-term training programs locally for practitioners.
- “Branching” has characterized the nature of psychodrama in Taiwan since 2005. Many Taiwanese students received U.S. or German accreditation and started offering programs to Taiwanese trainees. In addition to applications in psychotherapy, these methods have been applied on campuses, in communities, with business enterprises, and in correctional institutions. Work in the last decade also prompted us to adapt psychodrama to meet the needs of our own community, gradually transforming from a recipient of Euro-American-oriented theories to a new branch with more local focus and cultural sensitivity.

Part of our challenge in bringing psychodrama to Taiwan has been sociatric—that is, professionals have addressed social issues in a traditional culture. We have struggled to balance modern ideas with deep ties to Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—spiritual and philosophical traditions that emphasize collectivism, family ties, social hierarchy, emotional stoicism, and the Golden Mean (P.-H. Chen, 2009; Hwang, 2009). This in turn prompted our unique blending of cultural characteristics into the practice of psychodrama in Taiwan, although work is still required for Taiwanese psychodramatists to consolidate cross-cultural experiences with well-founded theories of our cultural framework. With this preface, consider again the historic timeline.

Stage 1: Sowing the Seeds of Psychodrama (1974–1987)

In Taiwan, psychodrama was first brought to people’s attention on November 22, 1974. On that day, psychiatrist Chu-Chang Chen, occupational therapist Hsiao-Jou Hsu, and social worker Ange Wu organized the first psychodrama study group at National Taiwan University Hospital. This multidisciplinary group performed weekly study on the first edition of Adam Blatner’s 1973 book *Acting-In*. It continued until June 1979 and counted up to 160 times of uninterrupted oral discussion, role-playing, and director training (Huang and Chen, 1996). The enthusiasm and persistence they demonstrated had undoubtedly sown a seed for Taiwanese psychodrama to grow and thrive.

On April 28, 1975, Dr. Chu-Chang Chen directed the first psychodrama on a psychiatric patient (Huang and Chen, 1996). This was then developed into a psychodrama program for an adult psychiatric day clinic, which is still running today (Parry, 1988). Dr. Chen, at the age of 84, still visits this weekly therapy group, showing a high spirit that none of us could admire more. In December 1983, Dr. Chen and Ange Wu published the book *From Drama to Insight*, which was translated in part from the first edition of *Acting-In* (Blatner, 1973) and supplemented with various examples based on their work in Taiwan. This book not only became the official material for clinical practice in five tertiary hospitals, it was also the first volume of authentic Taiwanese psychodramatic

heritage, transforming their learning experiences to working knowledge. Moreover, the publication of this book guided general readers in Taiwan to get familiar with psychodrama.

Another landmark publication of Taiwanese psychodrama was a quantitative study titled *Psychotherapy with Hospitalized Psychiatric Patients in Taiwan*. The results were presented at the first Pacific Rim Regional Congress of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy and Group Processes (IAGP) in Tokyo in 1987. It was the first Taiwanese publication describing the effectiveness of psychodrama in a local medical institution, and also the first record of Taiwanese input on psychodrama for the international community. These efforts led to the formal recognition of psychodrama as a method of group psychotherapy: On July 7, 1987, it was officially named a subdivision of the Chinese National Association of Mental Health.

In short, psychodramatic work in this period started in a self-educated fashion by our pioneers. While their studious efforts helped establish a solid ground for further development, they were also aware of the potential cultural clash when the West meets the East. In the book *From Drama to Insight* (C.-C. Chen and Wu, 1983), for example, Dr. Chen expressed his concern about Chinese familism and the suppressive nature of emotional expression, which may hamper psychodramatic methods, especially when acting on scenes that will require “washing dirty linen in public.”

Stage 2: New Buds on Campuses and in Communities (1988–1993)

While psychodrama continued in the hospitals, a new scene was set up on the campus of the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) when Ange Wu left the National Taiwan University Hospital for a professorship in the department of health education at NTNU. In 1986 she introduced creativity workshops in the university to promote unconventional mental-health services, one of which was psychodrama. Ever since, psychodrama has been a regular event on university campuses (Wu, Yeh, et al., 1994). This also prompted a few university psychology departments to start courses on psychodrama in the 90s, to help students learn about psychodrama, thus allowing them to apply the skills to school education after they graduated from teachers' colleges. Thereafter, psychodrama skills such as role-play and role reversal were frequently used not only in counseling rooms but also in classrooms.

Apart from campuses, we could also find psychodrama in communities during this period. The Liu Shiuh-Li Memorial Foundation was the first organization that systematically introduced the latest developments and information from abroad. It was also the first organization that offered regular psychodrama groups to help community members gain personal growth in ten-week programs. Based on these programs, Maria Cheng (1990) published a paper titled (in translation) *A Study on the Benefits for Psychodrama Participants*, which contributed to the understanding of the effectiveness of psychodrama in Taiwan. Maria Cheng and Hsing Wang also combined *family reconstruction* with psychodrama to work in the community (Cheng, 1989). Their intensive work in

this period compiled many concepts and elements specifically tailored to Taiwanese culture, which were published in the book *The Stage of Minds: Experiences of Psychodrama in Taiwan* (Wang & Cheng, 1993). Together with the early work on Chinese culture by Dr. Chu-Chang Chen and Ange Wu (1983), they built a foundation for psychodrama on local psychotherapy.

Nevertheless, this was also a time of change, a crossroads in life in Taiwan, a new opportunity for psychodrama. For example, You and Saner (1990) projected the necessity of psychodrama for our post-martial-law society. Taiwan had been under martial law since Chiang Kai-Shek retreated to the island in 1949. When the law was lifted in 1987, the freedom accompanied by true democracy immediately brought challenges to our traditional culture, provoking anxiety and social tension. People exercised their newly acquired rights and freedom by raising public protests, strikes, legislative violence, frenzies for stock trading, and even unprecedented crimes of kidnapping. You and Saner looked from the viewpoint of psychodrama theories and practice and interpreted those phenomena as act hunger, the pathological spontaneity resulting from our prior suppressive style of ruling and sudden exposure to freedom and many Western concepts that are in stark contrast to our traditional wisdom. They suggested that psychodrama could be the key to resolving our social disorders: Through psychodramatic action, we could release anxiety, introduce new possibilities, and again create from a stagnant cultural conserve.

Stage 3: Blooming with Diversity (1994–2004)

By this stage, psychodrama had become a popular term in Taiwan, and many overseas psychodrama trainers were invited to Taiwan to exchange experiences and to provide training. Among these trainers, Zerka Moreno visited Taiwan twice, in 1996 and 2000. As if to compensate for the unresolved disappointment resulting from the cancellation of her earlier trip in 1984, both of her visits were such great events that an audience of at least 800 people gathered in two open sessions. It boosted another wave of psychodrama's popularity in Taiwan. Moreno showed us her hardworking attitude with warm, touching expressions. She talked about J.L. Moreno, his work, and the development of psychodrama with enthusiasm that not only manifested the spirit of psychodrama but also inspired many more psychology practitioners to learn psychodrama.

Nevertheless, most foreign trainers were only able to stay in Taiwan for a few days, rendering it difficult for Taiwanese psychodramatists to obtain solid training. This did not change until 1994, when a group of psychodrama devotees successfully invited Gong Shu to set up regular training programs in Taiwan.

In 1993, Gong Shu attended the Pacific Rim Regional Congress of the IAGP held at the Grand Hotel, Taipei. This event was decisive in allowing Taiwanese psychodramatists to meet Gong Shu and to enjoy long-term on-site training in Taiwan. As a result of this, almost every psychodrama director now in Taiwan has received training from her. Especially with her Chinese background and early education in Taiwan, she combined Chinese art, qigong, and Taoism with psychodrama and greatly influenced the promotion and

expansion of psychodrama in Taiwan. She is also the pride of Chinese psychodramatists, being the first to extend training programs further for other Asian countries.

In 1998, Dorothy and Mort Satten also started offering training in Taiwan, although Dorothy's first visit to Taiwan had been back in 1987. They continued until 2008, when Dorothy became physically unfit to travel long distances and Mort passed away. Dorothy always used "the seven rights of a human being" as the theme of her training. Her motto "Real is better than perfect" broke the Chinese spell of acting with absolute perfection in our culture. Like a caring mother who contains all, she tended everyone with her love, which manifested her belief that humanity is the only key to true healing.

Ning-Shing Kung is another influential figure in the development of Taiwanese psychodrama. Being a Taiwanese devotee from the early days, she emigrated to the United States in the late 1990s to pursue comprehensive training and supervision. After completing her certification by the American Board of Examiners in Psychodrama, Sociometry, and Group Psychotherapy (the American Board) in 2006, she started annual programs, and she regularly brings the latest U.S. psychodrama news to Taiwan. She also kindly hosts and assists Taiwanese examinees who travel to the United States for certification by the American Board, cultivating Taiwanese psychodramatists beyond regular training. Zerka Moreno once described her as the rainbow bridging the psychodrama communities in Taiwan and the United States, partly due to her introducing us to Kate Hudgins, one of the founders of the Therapeutic Spiral Model.

Starting in 2002, Hudgins was invited to Taiwan to provide training for trauma therapists. On her first visit, in collaboration with Maryann Cox, she initiated a journey of acculturation despite the language barrier and comfortably invited local psychodramatists to join her team. Her training groups and on-site supervision helped us build a Taiwanese team that is currently providing weekly sessions for domestically abused women, to support them in finding strength on their way to a new life. With her smooth approach, she cared for our needs while healing people in the witness of love.

In the school year 2002–2003, Professor Rory Remer, TEP—who teaches at the University of Kentucky—taught in Taiwan as a Fulbright visiting scholar for one year. He offered a seminar on psychodrama for the graduate students in the department of educational psychology and counseling at NTNU. His yearlong course bolstered our knowledge of the fundamental theories of psychodrama. In his spare time after class, Prof. Remer kindly provided free psychodrama training and supervision for various organizations and groups all around Taiwan. During his stay, his wife—Dr. Pam Remer, TEP—came to visit and volunteered to teach as a guest professor. She combined the concepts of feminism and trauma therapy in her work and offered a refreshing perspective to our work here.

The richness of psychodramatic activities appeared not only in practical work but also in literature. During the ten years from 1994 to 2004, we had as many as 69 articles published, counting up to 49% of the total references found since the first mention of psychodrama in Taiwanese literature in 1968. These articles covered a wide array of psychological healing, from personal

growth to domestic and sexual abuse, chronic illness, and particularly the grieving and resilience work after the 921 Earthquake in 1999 (Cheng, 1999; Chung et al., 2001; Hsu et al., 2003; Hung and Chang, 2002; Lai, 2003; Wu, Liang, et al., 2000; Wu, Wang, et al., 1997). Moreover, several major titles on psychodrama were translated from English to Chinese, including the latest edition of *Acting-in* (Blatner, 1996), *Foundation of Psychodrama* (Blatner, 2000), *The Handbook of Psychodrama* (Karp et al., 1998), and *J. L. Moreno* (Hare and Hare, 1996).

One could very much say that this was the time when Taiwanese psychodrama received the strongest and most authentic influence from Euro-American psychodrama. However, it also introduced an inexpressible experience of culture shock for many Taiwanese psychodramatists. Nevertheless, the diverse contribution by foreign trainers and local efforts in both practical work and academia prompted us to explore further on our own path in the time that followed.

Stage 4: A Branch of Native Shoots (2005 Onwards)

With the frequent visits of overseas trainers, Taiwanese psychodrama trainees started to accumulate adequate hours and work experiences for formal accreditation. It also encouraged us to establish self-sufficient local training programs.

Currently, in Taiwan we have a total of 19 psychodramatists certified by various boards as the equivalent of certified practitioners, practitioner applicants in training, or TEP holders, some of whom have obtained certification from more than one organization. In particular, there are one TEP holder and six PAT holders who traveled all the way to the United States for certification from the American Board. The author is the first Taiwan-based TEP holder. She obtained her certification in October 2010 and has been providing advanced psychodrama training in Taiwan and other Asian countries, including China, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. Dr. Yen-Huei Lee, on the other hand, moved to Germany for her study in psychodrama, and she is now a director certified by the Moreno Institut Stuttgart.

Furthermore, we have many second-generation psychodrama directors trained natively in Taiwan in systems established by visiting TEP holders, including Gong Shu of the International Zerka Moreno Institute, Dorothy Satten of the Westwood Institute, and Kate Hudgins of the Therapeutic Spiral Institute. Several of them are also working toward American Board certification.

All 19 of Taiwan's certified psychodramatists were educated at the postgraduate level, and 10 of them have doctoral degrees and offer psychodrama courses in graduate schools of psychology-related disciplines. This influence has also contributed greatly to research work, which has produced 13 dissertations and theses in a short span of six years, showing more systematic efforts in the theories and practice of psychodrama.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TAIWAN

Our rising academic force suggests an increasing interest in culture-sensitive practice. However, among their published works, few of these academics have been directed to cross-examine the practice with cultural elements, such as social

hierarchy and self–other relations. A gap also remains between practice and well-grounded theories, although local practitioners have started to reflect on what should be done differently in our local practice. For example, some have suggested the need for a longer warm-up, while others have felt that more efforts are needed to establish a sense of security. To strengthen future development and bring about meaningful impacts on our cultural conserve, our psychodrama researchers need to consolidate our cross-cultural experiences with cultural theories and frameworks.

As psychodrama has gained maturity in Taiwan, people have started organizing frequent meetings and seminars in recent years. In February 2006, the Minisymposium on Psychodrama: Catching the Moments—the first Taiwanese event of its kind—invited Taiwanese pioneers and practitioners, including Dr. Chu-Chang Chen and Hsing Wang, to present in action the history of Taiwanese psychodrama over the past thirty years. In July 2006, 10 Taiwanese directors, together with Drs. Pamela and Rory Remer, were gathered to demonstrate their own styles and exchange experiences.

The second of these minisymposia was held in November 2007, and various Taiwanese drama directors shared the development of their own models for specific clientele. From this symposium, we found that psychodrama has been used not only in hospitals, communities, and campuses, but also in prisons and enterprises (Chou et al., 2010; Lai, 2011; Lin, 2008; Yang, 2008). In February 2008, we held the third minisymposium in Changhua, in central Taiwan. At this meeting, many voiced the desire to establish our own association, which resulted in the founding of the Taiwan Association of Psychodrama in Tainan on March 27, 2010.

The establishment of TAP represents a major milestone in the development of psychodrama, giving Taiwanese psychodrama an ever more independent status since July 7, 1987. At the founding ceremony, a total of 165 psychodramatists were gathered from all over Taiwan. Contribution awards were also presented to early Taiwanese pioneers Dr. Chu-Chang Chen and Prof. Ange Wu and to visiting trainers, including Gong Shu, Rory Remer, Kate Hudgins, and Dorothy Satten, for their devotion to Taiwanese psychodrama. Since then, the association has held annual two-day conferences and regularly hosted multiday workshops every year.

The association currently issues CP, PAT, and TEP certifications based on the standards established by the American Board. Additionally, the association provides certification for action group leaders, which serves two purposes. While it is an intermediate stepping-stone for helping professionals on their way to completing CP training, this level of certification also entitles those who do not work in the helping profession to apply action methods to classroom activities, community meetings, and many other occasions.

CONCLUSION

Looking back at the 40 years of psychodrama in Taiwan, I found that psychodrama moved from hospitals to campuses, communities, enterprises, and even correctional institutions. And with the advances in our capability to direct psychodrama, we are moving from a dependency on foreign trainers, where we

passively received Euro-American-oriented concepts and theories, to a new place which comprises more local focus and cultural sensitivity.

Despite some concern about the training process and future prospects of Taiwanese psychodrama, it stands as a well-received counseling and psychotherapy method. While in hospitals it is a treatment covered by national health insurance, most community works, including those in prisons, are supported by regional bureaus of social welfare. The governmental support allows Taiwanese psychodramatists to serve more people in need, including psychiatric patients, breast-cancer patients, families with disabilities, perpetrators of sexual abuse, people who have been abused, children and families with ADHD, people who are elderly, immigrant wives, and other community members. The diverse applications have also allowed us to reflect on and modify how we practice within our cultural framework.

Although a gap between indigenous practice and theories is yet to be reduced, the fast increase in academic staff and literature reassures us that our growing interest in indigenous psychodrama will not be limited to mere practical work but will extend further into the research and development of cultural theories. These cultural-specific efforts may also serve psychodrama communities in other Asian countries that share similar cultural beliefs and values.

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