

Transcultural Case Study, First Interview with a Chinese Client

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Abstract

A body oriented first interview in psychotherapy has a specific structure and praxeology. The article illustrates in detail a first appointment with a Chinese client. The important aspect of this circular-systemic process is the opportunity on the one hand to get enough relevant data, to find a diagnosis and a first indication. On the other hand the therapist can relate to and give feedback to the client and experience the client's reaction as well as the response of the client to the therapist's feedback. This is then translated into professional terms and is communicated in a narrative way. It is important to introduce the necessary transcultural perspective as the client is Chinese. This perspective is related to sexuality, shame, body-self, emotional dissociation, contact and relationship. All this is described on the basis of bodily expression: the practical relevance of body experience in a transcultural perspective. Finally this article is an attempt to understand psychodynamic aspects in terms of "body" (experience, expression, body-self and so on).

Keywords: shame, sexuality, transcultural, China, body psychotherapy

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Every practitioner, be he/she a trained body psychotherapist or a psychotherapist with a different background, who works with the methods of body psychotherapy is always concerned with praxeological issues. A detailed exploration of the question "How does what works, work?" has however only recently found its place in the professional literature. The structure of a first interview in body psychotherapy and a circular, systemic approach to the various relevant levels such as the biography, the initial assessment, reasons for seeking therapy, the therapeutic relationship, self-expression, (non-)verbal impressions, context, goal of therapy and so on belong to this rather heuristic perspective. I would like to present the first interview in body psychotherapy as a circular process between client and body psychotherapist with reference to a specific background. In this case it is an intercultural, or better, a transcultural issue. At this point I choose the concept of cultural relevance and not that of context or setting. With this I aim to emphasize the special significance in (body) psychotherapy of taking into account the "background" which may create a sense of identity. Context and setting seem to me on the one hand too vague as concepts, inducing an innate tendency to pay too little attention to contextual conditions. Too little attention because usually both parties are from the same cultural circle or live in similar contextual-societal conditions. When both participate in similar societal conditions, even if they vary significantly in specific details, this leads to a "reduction" in contextual

observation. This often arises understandably out of the many unconscious similarities, which people who are socialized in the same society or cultural circle acquire. Then we tend to pay attention to the (too) obvious contextual differences and special features and emphasize their significance in our practical work.

On the other hand observing events in psychotherapy in terms of an identity-creating background does further the psychotherapeutic attitude towards the whole process. Often the differences are (for good reason) constituent and therefore resistant to outside influence and should not be instrumentalized in psychological/psychotherapeutic terminology for one's own therapeutic culture. There are some differences which will remain different. The praxeology of (body) psychotherapy must align itself with this and review its own (body) psychotherapeutic concepts and theories with regard to their effectiveness. For what is effective, plausible and scientifically justified here may not work there, due to a different praxeology and cultural plausibility.

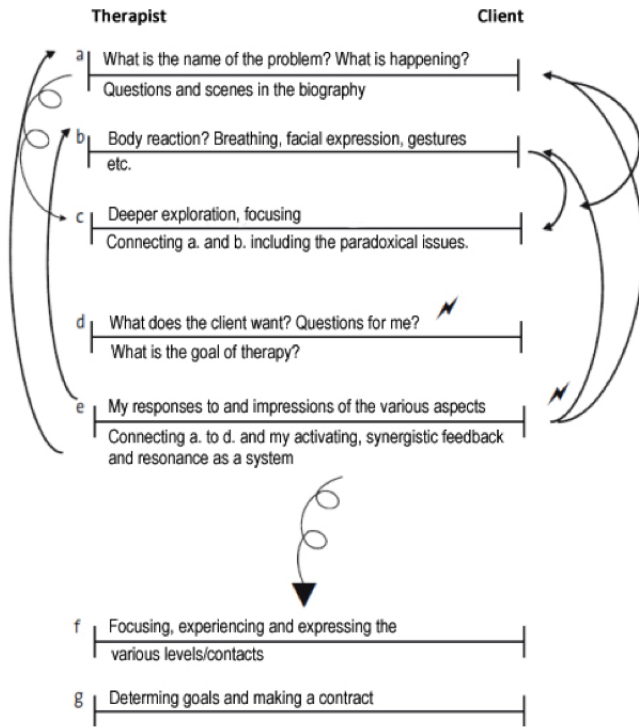
With Nazarkiewicz and Kraemer (2012) I see three relevant dimensions in meeting and working with different cultures:

- a) The intercultural approach (competence with regard to lifestyle: knowledge of the culture).
 - b) The multicultural approach (competence with regard to the rules of play, patterns of behavior: a sense of the culture).
 - c) The transcultural approach (competence with regard to cohesion: co-creating culture).
- For psychotherapy as a narrative process there emerges from this three essential elements:
- Culturally varying concepts of self.
 - Developmental concepts which arise from these.
 - The idea and treatment of varying hybrid identities (or patchwork identities).

Writing about a cultural field of tension in therapy arose out of the fact that my client is a Chinese woman living in Germany and also out of the differences in therapy cultures of psychotherapy and body psychotherapy, which shouldn't be underestimated and about which much too little has been written from the point of view of praxeology.

The first interview, which I retrace here is a single event plucked out of the whole. It demonstrates the structure and the circular systemic approach. As one example of a heuristic approach it shows an essential aspect of body psychotherapeutic practice. However the interview I present here can also be used by psychotherapists of other schools, who wish to integrate working with the body into their own practice.

An experience at a workshop inspired this Chinese woman, who studies in Germany and will remain here for several years, to come for an interview for therapy. She is more interested at first in clarification and is not suffering from specific psychological stress, which would lead directly to therapy. The structure of the diagnostic procedure in such a first interview offers both a general framework and also open questions and possibilities for therapeutic response.



a) What is the name of the problem? What is happening?

This 22 year old Chinese woman has been living in Germany for just over a year. She studies art and design at a university. She says she has taken on a job for two months in order to “earn a lot of money” in a relatively short time.

She lives together with other women students from East Asia and feels quite comfortable, although she is lonely. Although she sometimes meets up with her ex-boyfriend, she has no relationship with a man at the moment. She enjoys herself with her ex-boyfriend; they go for long walks outdoors and talk about everything under the sun. It is important to her to talk to people and exchange views.

From a cultural perspective Chinese students in Germany should allow themselves time to get to know the culture of this for them foreign country. These students often feel lonely, are homesick and stressed in two ways. Firstly they feel themselves as strangers in Germany; secondly they are used to living and acting communally. This is only possible in Germany if they are together with other Chinese, in a community which is naturally familiar to them. Then they cook together, talk, smile in a friendly way at Germans, but tend to avoid the necessary encounters and adjustments.¹

This client will soon transfer to another university, which will be more than 300 kilometers from where she lives now, so that she will be involved in a completely different environment. This doesn't seem to bother her, even though she is taking a step which will mean moving to a new environment without having any contact with the people there.

¹ Text in italics is the commentary by Wentian Li on the article by Ulrich Sollmann.

She has just finished her two month job in a Chinese massage studio, has now a month's holiday and will start to organize the move. She emphasizes, albeit casually, that Chinese women students often take these jobs in order to finance their studies in Germany. But this doesn't appear to be the only reason. She worked three days a week and often earned more than 500 Euros a day. She can't hide her pleasure at having earned so much, whereby she seems quite excited like a girl much younger than twenty two. She seems to me at this point so girlishly naïve.

Often Chinese students have no serious financial problems. Either they come from families who are financially independent or they have a scholarship or grant. Perhaps this student's need to earn so much additional money comes from having been overprotected in the family. Most Chinese families have a 4-2-1 structure (four grandparents, two parents, and a single child). The child is inundated with affection and attention. Grandparents and parents do everything for the child so that it hardly ever has to make decisions. On the one hand the child is idealized, on the other emotionally overloaded and controlled, dependent and lacking in autonomy. This means it is extremely difficult for them to grow up. These difficulties present themselves especially strongly, when a Chinese person who grew up in a one child family leaves his/her home country and comes to Germany.

Being spoilt coupled with a relatively unconscious dependency makes it difficult for them to develop relational competence. Therefore in China money often takes the place of relationships, which are then formed through money. Money therefore functions as a substitute and a compensation. The need to earn a lot of additional money, despite being financially relatively independent, could be interpreted as an unconscious wish for relationship.

She reports in detail about an experience in the massage studio, which impressed her deeply. They practiced erotic massage there, which she mentions in passing, as if she had helped out in a boutique. She got to know a man in the massage studio, with whom she had sexual contact, although she wasn't allowed to. She liked this man, but at the same time she complains, quite agitatedly, that he broke the rules of the massage studio by having sexual contact with her. She experienced herself as "somehow ambivalent" towards him, after she had stopped working there. The ambivalence had to do with whether she should have further contact with him or not.

Chinese students know about "ambivalence" in relationships. This client had therefore made a conscious decision, knowing well the ambivalent relational style of her childhood and youth (as with many Chinese). But young Chinese people are often unaware of the effect of this ambivalence in a foreign setting.

She is also ambivalent towards her own sexuality, in that she complains about the behavior of the man and becomes quite agitated, almost angry, with no relation to her own behavior in not rejecting his advances from the beginning. It seems as if her "reason" is complaining, while her body was aroused at the time. This arousal seems to be familiar to her, just as familiar as the criticism which she simultaneously levels at the man's behavior.

The client's description leads to three hypotheses:

- The client is obviously not familiar with the interplay of feeling sexual herself, expressing this feeling and relating to or distancing herself from a man.
- The client doesn't feel safe in her body-self, nor does she feel connected to herself or to her sexual identity (splitting off).
- The client can't perceive her ambivalence in the framework of psychodynamics, her own biography, or the specific sexual education of her culture (China). It appears as if she experiences herself unconsciously as "between" cultures.

The Biography: Questions and Scenes

At the initial meeting she doesn't speak at length about her family and her background. She has a twin sister, her parents are half Jewish and both work in the academic field (engineer and nurse). She had a good childhood, but there was a "felt secret", which she hasn't been able to discover, but which stirs her up inside, because she hasn't yet found a solution to it. She understands this secret as a "hidden agenda", a "hidden story" in her family. It has come to have crucial significance in her life and as she emphasizes herself, she must find out more about it at some point.

Usually such a family in China is characterized by the high expectations of the parents towards the child. The child experiences this pressure in all that it does, especially in learning. Chinese children can ultimately never satisfy their parents, as they are in the end only children and feel like children – they want to play, have fun and not always have to be as disciplined as the parents demand. This emphasis on discipline and on a hierarchical-moralistic structure creates a lot of tension, which is not easily resolved. Chinese children experience this as a kind of ambivalence coupled with low self-esteem. Normally the child cannot defend itself against the parents and the style of education.

She is obviously agitated as she speaks about these things. She sits up straight in her chair, her voice becomes hard and she stares directly at me. In the counter-transferential phantasy I sense an urgency, which the client herself feels in her unsuccessful search to discover the secret. Her voice becomes louder than before. As I listen carefully to her I suspect a subtle anger towards the parents. Quite unexpectedly she ends her narrative about this experience with the words: "I must find out what happened and what it means for my life." Even though I probe gently, she is quite vehement in her decision not to say more.

Although she clearly feels herself as Chinese and has a strong and clear attachment to Chinese culture, she has decided to study in Germany. As I want to hear more about her identification with Chinese culture, there develops a mood in the counter-transferential phantasy, as if the client doesn't feel "at home" any more in her culture of origin. I deduce this from her reaction to my commentary about her home town, Beijing. As I had just been in Beijing we chat a little about it as an interesting and beautiful city. Although she agrees with my view of the city, she abruptly closes the topic, similarly to the closing of the previous topic, so that I get the impression she doesn't want to talk about Beijing as the place of her childhood, as her home. At first I'm unsure whether I should interpret this as her not wanting to speak about her past in China in general.

One possible socio-cultural explanation for this behavior could be that successful and financially independent, rich people especially are not satisfied with their country. It often seems as if they have little cultural identification with their homeland, confronted as they are with the great discrepancy, the great cultural and economic divide, which is progressively worsening.

One could call this a "national inferiority complex". Chinese people living abroad tend to either almost patriotically defend their homeland or to distance themselves from it, in the hope of being accepted into Western culture.

She is also ambivalent (or split) about her name. She has of course a Chinese name (I will call her Huan), but in the massage studio she worked under a Western name (I call her Mary). This is because of her wish to protect herself and her private life from her massage clients and is understandable – and yet Chinese people like to adorn themselves with Western names, which they add to their Chinese one.

In the course of our first encounter it becomes clear that she is unconsciously conflicted regarding both her Chinese and her European names. She describes this as follows: “My (massage) client (I call him Walter) met me at my workplace, so he only knew me and paid me under my “professional” name. When he came for the second time Walter disclosed that he liked me. Later he even said that he was in love with me. I had warm and affectionate feelings for him; sometimes I was even a little in love. I believed him, because I could feel the emotional resonance myself. Also the contact to him was light and easygoing, something I like to feel in myself, but which didn’t happen with other clients. After I had left my job there, he contacted me through my private E-Mail address, which I’d given him before, and I had contact with him under my Chinese name, Huan. Of course,” and now she seems very determined, nervous and a little too controlled, “I couldn’t accept his behavior at all. He should have respected the regulations of the massage studio of his own accord. He shouldn’t have had sexual contact with me at all. That things went so far was his *responsibility*. So now that I’m not working in the massage studio any more I clearly have to reject him. And anyway,” she adds, almost in passing, “He got to know me as Mary. For Mary it was okay that I had contact with him and developed these feelings for him. But as Huan I couldn’t and shouldn’t have feelings for him anymore. And he should do the same.”

Many Chinese give themselves a foreign name. There are three possible reasons for this. Firstly the Chinese name is often difficult for foreigners to remember and to pronounce. Secondly people feel cool or chic when they have a foreign name and they have the feeling of being part of the foreign, idealized culture (partial identification). Thirdly, this can be the outward expression of an emotional split, whereby under their Chinese name they feel Chinese and unconsciously safer; then when they use their foreign name they slip without noticing into an idealized role. As long as the context and the structure of the relationship remain the same, as with this student, when she was officially working in the massage studio, things go well. But when she left, the structure disappeared and the emotional ambivalence became obvious in the relationship, which lead to her emotional and relational withdrawal.

As I enquire further she tells me a few more biographical details; she was very happy with her decision to study art and design. She makes the impression on me that she is highly motivated, happy and satisfied with her studies. And she says she was always curious and wanted to take part in and express life.

She is linked up with many people through social media, but doesn’t live actively in these relationships. It seems for her that social media are more a sort of network in the background, which gives her a certain structure, but she prefers direct emotional relationships, face to face. She loves kung fu, likes to read classical and modern kung fu novels and identifies herself with two specifically kung fu aspects, her power and competence as a sword fighter and her role of being “good and noble”. With this she means to fight for something good instead of just base, egotistical goals.

She loves romantic music, not too loud and not too difficult.

The immersion of this Chinese student in the world of kung fu novels, an illusory, idealized, world, leads to a double life of two extremes. In these novels there is only a good or a bad world view or value system. The world of these novels is clearly alienated from the actual life-reality of this student. She lives in her phantasy as a swordfighter and participates through idealized, imaginative role play in her self-confidence and identity.

Chinese children often fall prey to such identification behavior, as the high expectations that parents have towards their children leads to great problems in self-identification. Parents and

grandparents decide everything in the lives of the children. They determine the future, and Chinese culture, which is built on hierarchical relationships, supports this by emphasizing family duties, which arise out of the cultural identification. Chinese children do not get to know themselves, they don't learn how to reflect about themselves in contrast to the hierarchy and society in which they live. Questions like "Who am I?", "How will my future be?", "What will I decide to do?" are foreign to most Chinese children. A compensatory refuge is then the idealized novel- or comic-world (see also the Manga-world).

b) Body reaction? Breathing, facial expression, gestures etc.

The client is relatively tall for a Chinese woman. Also the strong, resolute way she has of shaking hands, which suggests self-confidence, is not typical for Chinese women. Yet my first impression of the person in my waiting room is of a more reserved, shy and delicate young woman, who does look me directly in the eye.

As we go into the therapy room together, she exudes non-verbal signals of both qualities simultaneously. She walks to her chair with strong, well-grounded paces, while she seems to hold herself back in the upper body, which seems energetically less powerful than her walk.

While we talk she looks at me openly and directly, even curiously, although her head is bent slightly forwards, which suggests that she is relating to me and wants to speak to me. Also her interest in my answers, my resonance signalizes this. Her breathing is rather soft and almost imperceptible, and yet she shows signs of vitality and possibly impulsivity. I can only deduce this from subtle signs when she gestures to express something or from a corresponding facial expression or an explicit movement. A certain gesture makes me suspect such a shy vitality in this client: whereas she usually sits back in a quiet way, she does reveal the "beginning of a movement", the "beginning of a facial expression" in various ways. The "beginning", which carries within itself the essence of an emerging, non-verbal impulse, a hesitant impulse, which doesn't yet dare to show itself, would in a visible movement or a visible facial expression be clearly recognizable as such.

Her eyes are alert, her gaze clear and in contact. The eyes are energetically sparkling as if she wants to take in everything that is happening to me as her partner in this conversation. The shine in her eyes doesn't change significantly in the course of it.

She answers my questions openly and at length, although she does have difficulty with the German language. Here again her reserved attitude comes out: she understands me much better than she lets on. Also when she speaks I have the same impression: I can understand her much better than she has expected.

She impresses me as very attentive, interested and "somehow" curious regarding possibly interesting aspects, important questions or comments which I bring up. In the process she seems spontaneous and impulsive, but at the same time fragile, shy, and reserved. Through the countertransference I can imagine that she has often experienced tension of some kind in communication and relationships with others. If this does appear after a while, she seems then to reveal her views and convictions more clearly if not unambiguously.

c) Deeper exploration, focusing

She had decided to work in an erotic massage studio. Her occupation was a physical occupation. Not only did she offer *body to body* massage, she had *implicitly offered her whole body and her consent to this*. As a physical body she was always present for her clients. Her body could additionally always be bought.

In contrast to the implicit offering of her body she basically prefers, as she herself emphasizes, verbal communication. She says this is very important to her. She illustrates this with various examples from her work and again almost in passing she adds that she finds satisfaction in communicating. It also seems that she was somehow subtly reluctant to do the massage work. It seems that she prefers word to word communication, but that she had played her role in the body to body contact without obvious complaint. It wasn't a problem for her, she asserts, she only wanted to earn a lot of money quickly and apart from that there were clear rules and structures in the massage studio.

This client has obviously lived in two very different worlds during her work: in a world of conscious, rationally experienced (emotionally split off?) and structured "body-to-body-world" and in a more unconscious, wistful, "emotional-contact-world". The first is carried and informed by the decision to earn a lot of money in a short time. In fact it was clear to her that she had offered herself and her body for money, but she couldn't feel that she had offered her feelings and her sexuality like commodities.

The other world is more characterized by the young woman's deep, rather wistful belief, that relationship is not possible without contact, without mutual trust or without personal communication.

When after a stressful working day she worked with the client mentioned before, she could almost have fallen asleep in his presence. She had enjoyed his caresses, had closed her eyes, curled into the fetal position and forgot both the time and her surroundings.

She emphasizes as if she were waking from a scenic daydream, that she loved her job, without a doubt. In the same moment in the countertransference phantasy I have the impression that she had no conscious, perceptible clarity about the job, the kind of communication it entailed and her relationship to her male clients. Likewise it seems to me that she had no conscious feeling of her motivation in choosing this job. When I mention this, she assures me that she liked the job and emphasizes almost in self-justification that she had to earn some money, a lot in a short time, "and that's all, nothing else".

As I ask how she experienced the body to body contact in the massage studio, how she experienced herself, she suddenly complains, full of indignation but also of indisputable anxiety, about the behavior of the men she met there. Some of them were "good" to her, but most of them ignored her as a person and were only interested in the erotic massage. They had used her. As she speaks she stresses the words more, her voice rises, but is still ambivalent and subtly fragile.

Some of them wanted intercourse, although this was not allowed in the massage studio. She could generally always resist, but with Walter she couldn't, because he behaved differently. He was very careful, open, gentle, kind and "knowledgeable". She finds numerous, differentiated descriptions for Walter's qualities. "I couldn't reject him".

She had not forgotten the regulations but her body had been sexually so aroused that she couldn't stop it. On top of that Walter was there, so gentle and careful, yet with such a strong sexual desire. Respectful but at the same time using her. As she describes it, if she had insisted on the rules he too would have kept to them.

By asking Huan for sexual contact the man seems to be expressing his needs, as do other men in Germany. His respectful and affectionate manner causes in her an ambivalent attraction. This ambivalence could be an interesting starting point for exploring whether there was a "traumatic development" in this student's childhood and whether this is connected to her experience in the family. This could lead also to exploring the inner psychic conflict between a sexually repressive

education and experience and a half consciously experienced sexual arousal and desire for fulfilment.

She had enjoyed each sexual contact with Walter. The encounter with him had fulfilled her, which is why she had neither rejected him as a person nor had she refused his sexual advances. Until his last visit in the studio.

She is convinced that all the men had only used the contact with her to their own advantage, although she had sometimes felt quite good with some of them. But in relation to Walter, with whom she had sexual intercourse, she seems to be stuck in a dilemma. She shows a clear interest in this man, his way of thinking and speaking, also in his life, in interacting with him, in his touch and his gentleness. Her fragile ambivalence is reflected in a moment when she remembers, that she had also felt a bit used by Walter. At that moment she suddenly stops talking. Despite Walter's sensitive, caring and understanding manner, after she stopped work in the massage studio she wasn't sure whether to have further contact with him. She had though, a few days before she finished there, spontaneously agreed to see him again outside the massage studio, equally spontaneously she had communicated with him on the social media, curious and amused by the contact. After this they had seen each other in the massage studio, but they each felt that both levels of the encounter were appropriate.

By giving her client her email address and communicating with him through it she seems to be living in another virtual world (the kung fu novels). The more clearly she experiences this, above all when she ends her work in the massage studio and begins a (possible) real relationship to her former client, the greater and the more intractable becomes the emotional conflict "in her heart". Now "the old structure of the massage studio" no longer offers any support or orientation.

As I ask what happened after she finished in the massage studio, she spontaneously sits up in her chair. She reduces her movements and her facial expression and her eyes fixate me more clearly than before. Her voice sounds a little sharp and her whole habitus seems more resolute, as though she has to bow to the necessity of controlling the situation, of mastering it, of controlling herself and any emotional and sexual impulses or feelings, which could perhaps unconsciously emerge, even if only as memories.

This seems to be a vitally significant question, as it seems to have made her more attentive and alert. Her non-verbal, body-language reaction is intense and spontaneous and can be interpreted as a sign of the importance of the theme. Also this offers the possibility of following up in a concrete and tangible way, in the here and now.

I ask her how she had rejected his sexual advances, how had she tried to draw the line. Although she has understood my words, she gives me an astonished look as I ask, which has the subliminal message: how could you ask such a question! Huan obviously can't sense the meaning of the question or of the importance of boundaries as an emotionally necessary part of a relationship. In this respect her answer surprises me. Quite dryly she describes how it was her body which felt aroused, energized and "sexually curious"; it was her body (and not she herself), which had abandoned itself to the sexual experience with this man.

She had obviously been physically aroused, but not emotionally affected or involved. Her intrapsychic and emotional defenses seem to dominate in the ambivalence of her mental state. At the same time these intrapsychic processes lead her into a defensive, childish position of dependency, which serves as a re-enactment.

Her voice again sounds serious and hard, which is familiar to me from those moments when she reports something apparently "normal" from her life without showing any visible emotional involvement. Then the sound of her voice changes at that moment where she accuses Walter of having "used her a bit". The voice is now excited, almost angry and shows

emotional participation. Her glance changes too quite suddenly. Her eyes open wide and show an intensity of expression, which is connected to a change in her sitting position. She sits up straight and the emotional arousal and inner engagement are clearly visible, but through the almost rigid, fixed posture, there are only hints at the “beginning” of a possible, surprising movement. Only for a moment? Just my guess?

The client had obviously decided to have a relationship with Walter and she knew from the beginning that it couldn't be a lasting relationship. The fact that she was nevertheless angry at him demonstrates the particular intensity of the intrapsychic conflict.

Treading carefully and taking particular care in my choice of words I start to mirror for her the paradoxical signals and experience with Walter. I link the mirroring with a cautious commentary, which I relate more to the concrete events she has described, rather than to a psychological interpretation or analysis. Despite my caution it seems as if she can't follow me or my explanations. Her subtle perplexity and helplessness suggest that she cannot know and feel at the same time, what a relational dilemma is. Again surprisingly, she is visibly agitated and complains anew about Walter's behavior. Of course she hadn't spoken to him about it, but for her it was completely clear that when she finishes in the massage studio, then she ends her contact with Walter. She hadn't seen him again “in real life”, but had had contact with him for a while via SMS and E-Mail.

It seems as if she was flooded and overwhelmed by the unconscious feelings, which arose out of the paradoxical situation. We could interpret this as a sign that she is neither sufficiently grounded in her body-self, nor in her sexuality as a grown woman. She doesn't feel emotionally secure in her body or in her sexuality. Instead of feeling she was acting out (reactive behavior).

She acts out, reacts, instead of relating on a feeling level – this seems to be one of her central behavior patterns. This pattern includes defending against anxiety as a feeling part of life, in particular the anxiety she was experiencing unconsciously in the paradoxical situation and the anxiety as a Chinese woman, to be speaking to me, a stranger, and reflecting on this situation. In the end it is the defense against anxiety about her (felt) body and her sexual arousal and their integration.

With regard to this paradoxical relationship she couldn't see or feel two aspects of her experience or of her own behavior:

- On the one hand she is convinced that she had a “right” to complain about Walter, although she had never clearly repudiated his advances or rejected him. I show her how astonished I am at this and mirror her my impression of her astonishment at Walter's sexual interest in her. She knew from her colleagues but also through her own previous experience with other men, that the clients who came to the erotic massage studio could develop such a sexual desire. But it seems to me that she couldn't feel the relevance of this dimension. She had to make the experience with Walter feel “normal” for her. This is a consequence of the unfelt paradox and the inner logic of the reactivated psychodynamics triggered through the experience. And a consequence of the logic of Chinese cultural socialization: acting out instead of relating in a feeling way.

Chinese society and culture are characterized by the emphasis on the collective and on hierarchical relationships. The wellbeing of the individual, of a single person, has to give way to the wellbeing of the collective, is subordinate to it. The feelings, wishes and interests of the individual are not only unimportant, but must be both internally and externally avoided, repudiated and

denied. This attachment pattern, initially a pattern of and within the family, then becomes a vital psychodynamic reality; for Chinese people abroad it becomes essential for survival. Children learn to hide their feelings in favor of a highly idealized image of the collective. For example feelings of homesickness when they are abroad, or longing for their own love choice, which is not accepted by the parents, are experienced or interpreted as weakness. When Chinese children later as students abroad are confronted with a different emotional climate, they react to this "other" by becoming reserved and silent, leading to serious psychodynamic conflicts.

- On the other hand she can't find my question relevant or meaningful. If she could she would probably have decided earlier against working in such a massage studio, knowing as she did, that clients were likely to have a sexual interest in her. She seems unable to follow my view of events, but rather repeatedly blames Walter and clings to the idea, that she could earn a lot of money in a very short time, almost as if she were hypnotized. We could interpret this interplay of the various aspects as evidence of dissociation in her experience of what happened. This dissociation made it possible for her to work there. As she herself said, she did need to earn money for her studies. Many other Chinese people have the same problem when they are in Germany, but still we could analyze this attitude to money as the expression of a basic mindset. It often seems that they live relationships through money, through earning money, through the value of money. Chinese people are often avaricious about earning money. People in Europe or in Germany experience this behavior more as a breakdown in contact and relationship, more as egoism, obstinacy, disinterest etc. The consequences are then often misunderstandings, tension on a relational level and rejection on a transcultural level.

The wish of Chinese students to earn some extra money is no different than in the case of German students. This could be (in addition to what was said above) a motivation for this client wanting to work in the massage studio. But it is another matter entirely that the work consisted of giving erotic massages. In China eroticism is under a strong taboo, especially in a "good, academic family". To break the bonds and traditions of Chinese culture by working in an erotic massage studio needs a special motivation. One explanation for this could lie in the repressive sexual education/development, but could also perhaps be found in Chinese youth culture and its sexualization. How can young Chinese people experience emotional, sexual and physical arousal as integrally connected, when they generally either don't have any sexual education or only in pornographic films on the internet?

In addition to the dissociation as an intrapsychic process Huan is also at the mercy of this transcultural tension, the clash of two cultural realms of experience. She can therefore only find it difficult on an emotional and a rational level to perceive the paradox of her experience and to recognize its consequences. It is just as difficult for her to experience herself as emotionally and physically integrated and not to dissociate.

This dissociation on the intrapsychic level is connected to her culturally conditioned identity and to the circumstances of living alone in a totally foreign country.

d) What does the client want? Questions for me.

Whether Huan is interested in contact with me or in working on the themes she mentions isn't clear at first. We could interpret the fact that she had come to the practice to talk to

me and that she had spoken about these experiences, despite having split the feelings off, as evidence of unconscious motivation.

Also we could evaluate the fact that she had spoken about her interest in Walter during her time in the massage studio openly, in detail and in a more personal way than was usual for her, as motivation for therapy. It could at least be a wish to get to know herself better, to experience herself more consciously and to explore her experiences. This motivation can be seen as relevant and directed on the basis of her psychodynamics and also as the expression of an emotional resource related to her desire to confront herself specifically with this emotionally conflicted behavior. This conflict, which is also an expression of her character structure, is mirrored on various levels of her personality, her style of expressing herself and of communicating with and relating to me.

She doesn't directly ask me any questions which would show a possible interest in therapy. Instead she tells me in detail about the questions she asked Walter, which could be taken as a sign of such an interest. The questions she asked Walter could also be an expression of her interest as a young Chinese in learning more about German culture and lifestyle. In the countertransference I see these questions as a hidden wish for more support, for answers which are a help in dealing with reality and with practical life. She seeks answers and support from a former client; does she seek them from me too, possibly in therapy?

The fact that she is not living in her own country, which means not moving in familiar circles, not communicating with people she knows and getting feedback from them, could have led Huan to see this first interview as a possibility "to just talk about herself and to be sure that somebody will listen".

So this is not yet a wish which could form the basis of a therapy contract. Other Chinese people behave in a similar way in a foreign country. If this is not just a single case, then it is a special challenge to engage with Chinese students in Germany in such a way that they can speak about themselves and feel themselves understood as they would be at home. This would give them some emotional relief and help them to develop greater competence in dealing with reality abroad. This in turn could be a starting point in broaching the issue of their desire for relationships. Such an approach would reveal the ambiguity, which we can conceive of as a relational behavior pattern expressing on the one hand "not the same as before" and on the other "not yet different".

"Not the same as before" would mean to become more conscious of the actual situation and to confront the difference between the China of one's feelings and the Germany of one's feelings. When accepted, this discrepancy would/could in a psychodynamic sense lead to emotional ambivalence. The issue of "not yet different" could be raised as being a part of their own real situation in Germany as well as being a possible partial identification, which could be developed in an emotionally meaningful way.

From a psychodynamic perspective Huan's behavior could be understood as an unconscious partial identification with Walter. By asking him simple questions when he was in the massage studio, she was unconsciously hoping for a kind of emotional support through his answers. We could assume that asking these questions, which demanded cognitive answers, was for her a suitable way of trying to relate, even though she effectively couldn't feel this. Therefore the content of the answers that she hoped for and perhaps to a certain extent received, wasn't so important; instead the question/answer relationship gave her the possibility of relating to a man by unconsciously partially identifying with him. This partial identification is interesting in a psychodynamic as well as in a transcultural context. It enables her to contact his ability to express his feelings and his sexual desires by participating in them

without being consciously aware of it. Also it allowed her to relate to a man in a permissible way. This process seems to only have been possible under the conditions in the massage studio. In this context, which gave her a feeling of security, she could live the relationship through acting out rather than through feeling.

Outside this context, one could say, the dissociation protected her from emotional confusion, which most young people from China would likewise experience, as they all grew up in comparable conditions and are similarly sexually inexperienced.

The questions Huan put to Walter were relatively simple, but at the same time emotionally important for her:

1. Can you tell me more about your work?
2. How do you manage to be so gentle, affectionate and understanding towards women?
3. How do you approach women sexually?
4. Please tell me more about yourself and your life.

While telling me about the questions she asked Walter, she seems emotionally involved, sure of the significance the questions have for her and strong and expressive in her non-verbal body language. At the same time she seems curiously aware of the importance of her encounter with this man, as if she had a premonition that through it she would be entering a new and important phase of her life. Also, the experience of sharing all this with me seems to have an equally great importance for her.

I am starting to ask myself what her deeper intentions could be in regard to a possible therapy process. She herself says nothing about this, but in the countertransference I notice a curious “necessity” to ask her more specific questions. This countertransference impulse could be interpreted as an important mirroring of her unexpressed wish for therapy. Therefore I give her extensive feedback about her effect on me, which seems to me a basic requisite of a first interview in body-oriented psychotherapy. What do I notice of her when I am speaking to her? (How do I see her? How do I observe and experience her physical, non-verbal expression? How does the ambivalence in this expression reveal itself to me and how do I experience it?)

Together we begin to explore the dynamics of the tension she feels as a characteristic of the conflict she has described of working in the erotic massage studio and her decision to work there, which meant being confronted with the sexual desires of the clients and at the same time not wanting sexual contact with them. In the end however she did have sexual contact with one client. In the course of a possible therapy this would necessarily involve exploration of crucial aspects such as:

1. What was her motivation in working there, knowing that she would have to reckon with sexual wishes, although she didn't want sexual contact?
2. What made it difficult for her to refuse Walter's sexual advances and to draw a clear line?
3. How could she feel the relevance of the various aspects of this conflict and evaluate them meaningfully, in order to learn how to establish borders, or to sense the necessity for them?
4. How could she get to know her own bodily and emotional sensations and arousal processes in contact with herself?
5. How could she get to know her own inhibitions, her sense of modesty and her cultural conditioning about feelings, contact, and sexuality? How can she become so familiar

with this as an interaction of intrapsychic processes and cultural conditioning, that she could experience and relate appropriately to people in this “new” German culture, which she doesn’t know?

6. What is the family secret, that she had briefly but emphatically mentioned, all about? Was she traumatized as a small child and if so how? *In this instance a transcultural approach is indispensable.*

In this first interview of course we don’t look for specific answers to these questions. The first is to build up contact with this Chinese client, which is an important step in enabling us to establish a role- or contract-relationship with her. This is an absolute requirement for a possible therapy. Posing some of these questions without expecting an answer just yet, already promotes the mobilization of her incipient perception of her feelings and her physical expression. The interaction of these factors is an important, potential therapy goal, even though she hasn’t yet addressed this.

Enabling the client to establish a relationship to me as a person she can trust and to help her experience this as a necessary first step is already a first goal of therapy and as such a matching process, as is the transcultural matching. This first step is a heuristic approach in the here and now, which respects and relates to her cultural background, her education and experience on the one hand and German culture on the other. The heuristic method of sharpening awareness for the contact function relates to her body, the feelings involved, the work situation in the massage studio, the therapeutic relationship to me and the different cultural experiences she has herself had in China and in Germany.

Connected to this is a third possible therapy goal, which is becoming aware of, experiencing and grounding oneself in a good body-self. This includes the emotional relationship to the client’s cultural background, specifically her education in regard to sexuality as well as the corresponding cultural/societal customs of relating sexually to others, and developing awareness of this both on a haptic and on an emotional level. Using a transcultural approach means therefore utilizing Huan’s experiences in China as the “background culture” and her experiences in Germany as the “here and now culture”.

e) **My responses to and impressions of the various aspects**

At the beginning of our first meeting I encourage Huan to just speak freely about herself without any specific plan and without any questions from me.

This approach corresponds to free association in psychoanalysis in as far as the client can speak about herself as things occur to her. From a body psychotherapy perspective this also offers the opportunity of observing her non-verbal body language, an advantage always offered by a body oriented approach. In this way we obtain information which *appears not to be relevant*. Through this there develops a heuristic field of tension between what she expresses verbally, what she expresses non-verbally and also what seems to embody itself as an implicit exchange of perceptions in the incipient therapeutic relationship. This then becomes inductively a process-related scenic presence. Connected to this is the conscious perception of her non-verbal reaction, the bodily expression, as a significant, though not yet understood, style of behavior.

The invitation to free association and to spontaneous non-verbal expression also serves to build up the necessary trust for our further work together. It is also helpful to encourage both through questions and through my own behavior in a seemingly casual way, her noticing and

perceiving her often subtle “beginning” reactions. This allows Huan to begin to trust herself and her own often unconscious self-expression. This incipient decrease in (self-) control is conducive not only to free association, but also to her experience of herself in relation to me as a different person. To open oneself to another corresponds in a transcultural sense to making oneself “public”. Being “public” is seen in China as extremely shameful. If I had encouraged too much communication at our first meeting, this would have impeded progress.

It is interesting in this context to look at how far Chinese students are accessible emotionally and communicatively. Even if they have grown up in the 4-2-1 family structure, there is still a great difference between the generations concerning how they accept and deal with the public domain. The question is how they can integrate their differing experiences?

Against this setting of the transcultural disparities between China and Germany this approach is absolutely necessary. These differences often form a determinant background which remains emotionally unconscious and thus all the more potent. Understanding these background elements, especially the experience of self as a “self in public”, can help us to understand and appreciate both the experience of Huan as a young Chinese person in her own cultural socialization and the contrast with German culture. Particularly when working with Chinese people, showing respect for their culture and for the influence it has had on their own lives, their feeling and thinking, is a great help in building up a therapeutic relationship. The same is true of course for respect towards our own culture. The emotional/narrative approach allows me to gain a transcultural insight into the life story and the general living conditions of the client. At the same time I start to become aware of possible differences to my own, German, background and living situation. In the course of our encounter I can utilize these as possible, relevant disparities, so that these considerations have an important reality function, as it is often “dangerous” to think in categories of background, living conditions and cultural socialization too early and then to act, or treat, accordingly.

Huan presents a central, heuristic area of conflict insofar as we must not only evaluate and treat her sexual problems in the context of her cultural experience, but also on the level of intrapsychic dynamics and possible dissociative processes. It is much more important, and here we have the true heuristic art of body psychotherapy, *to keep both aspects adequately and respectfully in mind* – the cultural background and the identity which has been built up out of it on the one hand, and the dissociative processes within the psyche, whether cultural or psychogenic, on the other.

In summary this means: this transcultural approach to body psychotherapy takes place in an atmosphere of no longer culturally determined, but not yet sufficiently understood as a psychogenic or psychodynamic phenomenon.

The body-oriented approach proves to be helpful and necessary in establishing psychotherapy as a transcultural relationship. Both culture/society and one’s own body always have, next to their psychological, emotional aspect, a material, i.e. visible, tangible and mobile aspect, which provides concrete experiences of therapy and of life.

f) Focusing, experiencing and expressing the various levels/contacts

For me it is important particularly in the first interview to have enough distance from the client to be sufficiently open for my perceptions, but also for my own, phantasies and impressions, for my emotional resonance and the echo of my body (counter-transference). If I was very active there would be the danger that the client would experience me as controlling the situation and would be in danger of being overwhelmed. This is particularly a danger in

body psychotherapy, which shouldn't be underestimated, especially if therapists don't have enough experience of their own bodies.

The approach and the corresponding form of the therapeutic relationship is circular insofar as I thread my reactions into the flow of the clients' own questions and offerings in each situation which arises. I usually respond to the here and now, to the information which the client presents, whether verbal or non-verbal. My feedback is increasingly related to the simultaneously presented verbal and non-verbal signals and to the reaction of the client when I describe my impressions.

This protects me from the trap, which we can so easily fall into, of developing and acting upon a hypothesis too early. This would be a therapeutic mistake as, considering my own blind spots, I would be in danger of setting up a hypothesis without an understanding of the cultural background. A further danger would be, especially with Huan, that she would feel in a subtle way irritated in her relation to me and the trust which is beginning to appear between us would be disturbed. I am therefore open to all my perceptions, my observations of the whole relationship in the therapy room, especially the interaction between Huan and me, which existed right from the beginning, from the first impression. I am open too for aspects which don't seem meaningful or connected to each other or to the situation.

The challenge here is for therapist and client equally to become aware of their own and of the foreign culture and to adjust accordingly. The art of transcultural therapy lies in developing at first in oneself and later in the client an increasingly conscious sense of the cultural differences and similarities on the one hand, as well as of the requirements of the real, often ambivalent situation, adapting to it while practicing restraint at the same time.

Language difficulties and the continuous need for translation mean that verbal communication is only of limited use, which means that the non-verbal, body language gains in importance. We can communicate thus in a concrete and visible way and understand its significance, especially if we also speak about it. I am increasingly strengthened in this approach to transcultural therapy by the experiences I gather working with it.

In the last phase of the first session I become more active in that I offer Huan feedback about the various aspects of the here and now, of her behavior, our relationship as well as my experiences, my view of the situation and the ideas arising from it. I refer only to the situation at the first meeting for the following reasons:

- This condenses the first session into a shared experience.
- It condenses verbal feedback, reporting, experience, body openness and possible discrepancies or plausibilities.
- It brings together the situations we experienced in a narrative.
- It focusses scenic interaction of person, behavior and body expression.
- It provides transcultural feedback.

This openness stimulates, inspires and vitalizes the client with the result that she can show herself more spontaneously, with less control and self-consciousness. This step shows a partial identification with me, which in turn supports a synopsis of the information, signals and messages, which revealed themselves in the previous conversation and non-verbal communications. This synopsis links with the partial identification and offers a relatively conscious overview of possible problems, themes and ensuing treatment goals. This is also supported by her experience of the plausibility of therapy through our shared experience and through the feeling of developing mutuality.

Containing the whole session in this way enables us to filter out possible needs, implicit questions and problems by considering mainly her first impressions, her first presentations.

g) Determining goals and making a contract

For the Chinese client, Huan, her specific experience and her conflicts (whether unconscious or structural) we can develop a complex initial formulation under the following aspects:

- The perspective of a traumatic development.
- The perspective of a structural character conflict, resistance, physical blocks, arousal processes and sexuality.
- The perspective of a transcultural experience.

Psychotherapy is an integrative process in a relational field, which should be open for the interaction of various perspectives, especially the explicit and implicit influences of the here and now. This calls for a continuous and conscious perception of the situation and one's own emotionality as therapist and of the countertransference reaction on a bodily, non-verbal level. It also involves dealing sensitively with the transference relationship. Ultimately this is for both parties a transcultural experience.

The transcultural familiarization can be expressed in the relative deconstruction of one's own, preconceived ideas and concepts about normality and asymmetries. We are oriented simultaneously towards the similarities and the differences of interaction, identity, boundaries and emotional expression either in public or in private.

At the first session we don't speak specifically about indications, even if we can implicitly recognize or deduce them. If I acted differently, in my experience, then I risk the client becoming irritated or I subtly endanger their contact to me, which could result in them breaking it off or even becoming emotionally overwhelmed.

Therefore I choose primarily central aspects of the process that has taken place in the here and now and condense them to a clear "story", so that single aspects and relevant perspectives can be seen in relation to one another. Clients have to recognize their own words, memories, expressions, complaints and their physical, non-verbal expression in the sense of a relational matching in this "story". This includes my feedback as well as my impression about possible future steps, whether these are therapeutic or possible plans for the clients themselves in their own daily life.

I differentiate four interlocking fields of observation for Huan, whereby if one aspect is in the forefront the others are continuously present in the background. This shows itself in a sensory openness also in the countertransference for everything that starts to develop spontaneously:

1. Encouraging conscious, sensory perception in the here and now of the therapeutic situation.
2. Careful exploration of the experience of a possible early traumatization (in her family) and corresponding verbal and body oriented interventions.
3. Structural, character-analytical work with her psychodynamics, including work with the psychic and emotional resistance, physical "blocks", dissociations and sexuality in the context of body psychotherapy concepts.
4. Including scenically transcultural experiences and communicating respect for both her own and for the foreign culture, especially the issue of shame and its representation in

Chinese and in German culture. It is implicit and unavoidable in body psychotherapy that this issue is always elicited and must be addressed. Therapy is always a “public place”. Body psychotherapy can never be separated from this public place and has therefore an indispensable access to the work with shame and in this case connected to Chinese culture inside and outside China.

5. One’s own body in the therapy room is always present and visible, even if it is split off and we must speak of a felt and an un-felt body. Despite this, what happens in the therapy room works (un)consciously, emotionally in the client and is always visible for others – this means that others in the room can relate and react to it at the least unconsciously, emotionally.

The following therapy goals seem to me to be indicated here:

- First it is important to help Huan to develop a stable and secure body-self. This would improve the flowing, conscious sensitivity to her own body and the experience of this sensory self. Such a body-self would help the client to become familiar with a feeling of vitalization and the experience of arousal, whether emotional or sexual. She would then experience the body as capable of arousal, as excited and as sexually aroused.
- The therapy process uses primarily a body oriented, non-verbal approach and the corresponding experience of self and body expression in relation to the therapist. This body experience will probably allow access to pre-conscious or unconscious experiences, which took place in the family. If Huan can experience her anxiety about this family secret as a feeling of fear in the body, this could open up experiences which she can’t initially remember.
- The body-oriented, psychodynamic approach makes it easier for Huan to present herself on the various levels of her personality and “in public”. On the one hand she will be encouraged to experience and express herself as a person, as a unity, which in its turn mobilizes the perception of dissociation as an intrapsychic defense. On the other hand this approach revives the (re)experience of shame, the inescapability of being seen (bodily, emotionally and relationally) “in public”. This aspect is especially important for the work with Huan and for working with Chinese clients generally. The experience of shame and guilt in society can then be observed on a personal and cultural level.
- The body-oriented, transcultural approach also allows us to focus on resources on a personal, an expressive and a cultural level. In the case of Huan the following resources could be important: elements of self-confidence and determination, strength of expression with the body, cognitive self-confidence, courage and determination connected to sensitivity and a feeling for sensual-sensory awareness and a conscious acceptance of her gender role.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Honoring Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD

6 EDITORIAL
Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD

POEMS

10 A World Apart
Marcel A. Duclos

11 Manuel de l'enfant trouvé—mémoire
The Foundling's Handbook—Memory
Salita S. Bryant

ARTICLES

12 Embodied Clinical Truths
Terry Marks-Tarlow

28 The Return to the Self: A Self Oriented Theory of Development and Psychotherapy
Will Davis

47 Research 101 for Somatic Psychotherapists: Cultivating a Research Mind
Christine Caldwell & Rae Johnson

55 Let's Face the Music and Dance: Working with Eroticism in Relational Body
Psychotherapy: The Male Client and Female Therapist Dyad
Danielle Tanner

80 Relational Body Psychotherapy (Or Relational Somatic Psychology)
Aline LaPierre

101 Held Experience: Using Mindfulness in Psychotherapy to Facilitate Deeper
Psychological Repair
Shai Lavie

109 Transcultural Case Study, First Interview with a Chinese Client
Ulrich Sollmann & Wentian Li
Translated by Elizabeth Marshall

128 Felt-Work: Interview with Hilde Hendriks
Jill van der Aa

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