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TAOISM AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Spirituality and religious coping is an important and rapidly expanding field in recent years. For the Chinese, traditional Taoism may still have a strong impact on the mental health of Chinese people. Taoistic concepts of mental health stress the transcendence from self and secularity, the dynamic revertism of nature, integration with nature and the pursuit of the infinite. Compared with western concepts of mental health, Taoism advocates self-transcendence, integration with the Law of Nature, inaction and infinite frame of reference instead of social attainment, self-development, progressive endeavor and personal interpretation. By means of a case illustration, the writer tries to describe its impacts on help-seeking, stress and coping, and the meaning of life of a Chinese family. Its generalization to different types of Chinese communities is also discussed.

Key words: mental health, Taoism, Chinese philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality and religious coping is an important and rapidly expanding field in recent years (Pargament *et al*., 2001b; Pargament *et al*., 2000; Van Ness & Larson, 2002; Rammohan *et al*., 2002; Seifert, 2002; Miltiades & Pruchno, 2002; Pargament *et al*., 2001a; Krause *et al*., 2001; Case & McMinn, 2001; Ferraro & Kelley-Moore, 2001). Religious coping strategies are found to be effective for people in facing mental illness (Rammohan *et al*., 2002; Rogers *et al*., 2002); developmental disabilities (Miltiades & Pruchno, 2002) physical illness (Keefe *et al*., 2001; Sherman *et al*., 2001; Pargament *et al*., 2001a; Koenig *et al*., 1998); threat, loss and challenge situations (Maynard *et al*., 2001) and the end of life (Van Ness & Larson, 2002). Religious coping strategies are also commonly used in people with different ethnicity in various countries, such as black students in South Africa (Peltzer, 2002); older adults in Japan (Krause *et al*., 2002); African American women (Bowie *et al*., 2001); Korean, Filipino and Caucasian Americans (Bjorck *et al*., 2001); as well as Slovak adolescents (Strizenec & Ruisel, 1998). For the Chinese, traditional Chinese cultures such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are crucial in religious coping (Yang, 1995; Yang, 1997; Fei, 1984; Chu, 1992; Lin, 1981; Lee, 1995). Taoism has long been recognized as the most influential traditional Chinese wisdom in the world (Fung, 1948; Cheng, 1995; Tong,

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1986; Wu, 1986; Tseng & Wu, 1985; Chu, 1992; Lin, 1981; Suen, 1983). It originated in the late Chou Dynasty (around 500 BC) from Yang Chu, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu (Fung, 1948). The writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu are the most influential cultural roots for the Chinese mind for a thousand years and their influence is still profound in modern days (Yip, 1999; Chu, 1992). Taoism also stimulates the wisdom of western minds (Caputo, 1988; Koeing & Spano, 1998; Chu, 1992; Brandon, 1976). For example, the Dao-De-Jing, the work of Lao Tzu has been a great favourite in western countries. Among European sinologues, Lao Tzu is the most often translated book. The first Latin translation appeared before 1788 AD and since that date numerous versions in all the principal European languages were published. It is estimated about 200 versions of Lao Tzu in most kinds of western language can be found (Cheng, 1995). In this paper, the writer tries to describe related mental health concepts in classical Taoism written by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. By means of a case illustration, the writer tries to show the impact of Taoism as a religious coping strategy for a Chinese family in facing stress and sufferings.

WESTERN CONCEPTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Western concepts of mental health originated from the 'mental hygiene' movement that focused primarily on a positive perspective on life so as to prevent mental illness (Ridenour, 1961; Menniger, 1947). Later, it changed to a concept of 'personal adjustment to the social environment' (WHO, 1975; Wooton, 1959; Clare, 1976; Callicut & Lecca, 1983; Neumann, 1989), presupposing that a mentally healthy person can adjust to the social environment and perform his or her social roles effectively. Thackery *et al*. (1979) elaborated this perspective into three crucial elements: feelings of self-worth, satisfaction with roles in life, and positive relationships with others. Within the 'Global Assessment of Functioning Scale' used in DSM IV, mentally healthy individuals should have superior functioning in a wide range of activities (APA, 1994: 32). More recently, in considering systemic factors, Read and Wallcraft (1995) advocated a social environment of equality and mutual respect in nurturing mentally healthy individuals.

All these concepts of mental health are focused on the full manifestation of an individual's potential to build one's sense of self-worth, to have satisfaction with one's social roles and good adjustment to society. Within these concepts of mental health, in this paper, the writer tries to describe Taoistic concepts of mental health and the impacts on mental health and religious coping of the Chinese communities.

TAOISTIC CONCEPTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The term 'mental health' is actually a western word. In traditional Chinese writings, there is no exact word similar to 'mental health', instead, words like 'Fa Lok' (happiness), 'Wor' (harmony), 'Sim On' (internal sense of security) and 'Tin Yu' (relaxed) are used. Among various classical schools of thoughts, Taoism was developed by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu in late

Chou Dynasty about 500 BC (Eberhard, 1977). Their writings laid the foundation of the later development in Taoism as well as the Tao religion in the Hang and Sung Dynasty (Wu, 1986; Cheng, 1995). In this article, the writer focuses on the original texts written by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. As these were written in ancient Chinese, the discussion is based on the translations by Fung (1948) and Cheng (1995).

Transcendence from self and secularity

Taoism encourages individuals to transcend from self and the secular perceptions.

Wealth and attainment are perishable

> A man who proudly displays his riches invites trouble for himself. The effacement of self after success has been achieved is the ways of Heaven. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 9, translated by Cheng, 1995)

In the eyes of Lao Tzu, attainment, wealth, reputation are not imperishable. One should not rely on all these perishable things to define one's sense of wealth.

Sensational gratification is not trustworthy

> The pursuit of pleasures deranges the mind of man. The love for wealth perverts the conduct of man. Wherefore the Sage attends the inner self, and not to the outward appearance. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 12, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Gratification of sensational needs deprives one true mind and true freedom in self and being. The pursuit of all these sensational needs may also harm one's body and soul.

Honor and disgrace are alike

> Honor and disgrace are alike a cause of excitement. The great trouble of man lies in the love for self. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 13, translated by Cheng, 1995)

That means, one should not be excited by honor nor be threatened by disgrace. Honor and disgrace are the same. One should regard ones's health as having at least the same importance as honor and disgrace in the world.

Pride and egocentrism are not long lasting

> Those who are self-complacent are not enlightened. Those who are self-important are not illustrious. Those who are self-conceited are not successful. Those who are self-assertive are not supreme. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 24, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Self-pride and egocentrism are not long lasting. True success lies in the transcendence of one's wealth, health, pride and attainment.

The dynamic revertism of nature (Tao)

Lao Tzu said the 'Tao' is the 'Super-one'. It is everlasting and changing and exists in form of dynamic revertism.

The relative nature of all standards

> Thus we have the alternation of existence and non-existence; the succession of the difficult and the easy; the comparison of the long and the short. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 2, translated by Cheng, 1985)

Existence and non-existence, good and bad, difficult and easy, long and short, high and low are all relative and complementary. One should not be bound by all these standards.

Moral and immoral are relative and complementary

> When the great Truth is abandoned, the teachings of benevolence and righteousness prevail. When wit and cunning are highly esteemed, the adepts in hypocrisy become fashionable. When discord reigns in the family, the teachings of filial piety and fraternal love become fashionable. When chaos prevails in the country, the loyal minister becomes fashionable. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 18, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Dynamic revertism teaches us that moral and immoral are relative and complementary.

Absence makes the room for presence

> The substance and the void are both essential to the usefulness of a vessel. Doors and windows are hewn in a house . . . Thus, the presence of something may prove beneficial, just as the absence of something may prove useful. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 11, translated by Cheng, 1995)

The usefulness and value of things are also relative. It is the absence that makes presence meaningful. It is the void that makes the substance useful.

Suffering and blessing are relative and unpredictable

> What one calls calamity is often a fortune under disguise. What one calls fortune is often a call of calamity . . . The good may turn out to be evil. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 58, translated by Cheng, 1995)

That means suffering and blessing are actually two sides of the same coin. At the end of suffering is the beginning of blessings. Similarly, calamity exists in good fortune. Both suffering and blessing are unpredictable.

Secular standards are not trustworthy

> Secular standards are not trustworthy as things are relative, dynamic and reversing.
> In the eyes of Tao, things are not worthwhile or worthless. In terms of the things themselves, worthwhile and worthless are relative. In secular standards, value and worth are dynamic. From a perspective of difference and relativism, everything is big in terms of bigness. In terms of smallness, everything is small . . . Thus everything has its own worth and they are complementary to one another. In the mind of a wise man, right and wrong are dependable on what sort of criterion you are using'. (Chuang Tzu, Stream of Autumn)

Revertism of Tao is eternal and everlasting
Tao is eternal and everlasting as pointed out by Lao Tzu:

> Tao (the Truth) may appear hollow, but its usefulness is inexhaustible. It is so profound that it is inexhaustible. It is so profound that it comprehends all things. (Lao Tzu in Cheng, 1995)

Integration with the Law of Nature (Tao)
Abide and attain by inaction

> The Sage is ever free from artifice, and practises the precept of silence. He does things without the desire for control. He lives without the thought of private ownership. He gives without the wish for return. He achieves without claiming credit for himself. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 2, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Non-interference and inaction not only release others from their own limits and frames. They also lessen unnecessary competition, struggle and confusion in a person's life.

Inaction or nothingness is the best form of self-preservation
The best way to get absolute happiness (or a high level of mental health) is to remain in a state of 'nothingness' and let everything, including calamity and blessings happen naturally.

Passively progressive

> A man who proudly displays his riches invites trouble for himself. The effacement of self after success has been achieved is the way of Heaven. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 9, translated by Cheng, 1995)

To be persistently progressive, one must know when to be active and when to be passive.

Return to the natural silence (quiescence)

> When one has attained the utmost humility and abided in the state of extreme quiescence, he can observe the cycle of changes in the simultaneous growth of all animate creation. Things appear multitudinous and varied, but eventually they return to the common root, quiescence. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 16, translated by Cheng, 1995)

The state of natural silence is a state of quiescence, in which everything returns back to its original state. In this state, one can integrate with the Law of Nature and beware the dynamic and changes in everything.

Tune into the natural harmony

> The whole universe may be compared to a bellows. It is hollow, but not empty. It is moving and renewing without cease. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 5, translated by Cheng, 1995)

The spirit of life is immortal and may be compared to the mysterious productive power which forms the base of the universe. It is imperceptible, and its usefulness is exhaustible. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 6, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Tao has no favourites; it treats everyone in the same way. One should integrate with the Law of Nature and enjoy the inexhaustible power of the universe.

High level transformation and transcendence

Following in the footsteps of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu further develops the ideation of 'Dynamic Revertism' into 'High Level Transformation and Transcendence'. (Fung, 1948)

Infinite point of view

> 'To see thing from the light of Heaven': means to see things from the point of view of that which transcends the finite, which is Tao. (Chuang Tzu, Ch'I Wu Lun, in Chang, 1983)

In the eyes of Chuang Tzu, the decision of right and wrong is no longer meaningful and worthwhile. A wise individual with Tao in mind should follow the infinite point of view of nature and achieve real peace of mind regardless of changes in social environment.

Pursuit of absolute happiness

Chuang Tzu said that one should not be confined by relative happiness, instead one should strive for absolute happiness which is a universal level of understanding and standpoint. (Fung, 1948; Tong, 1986)

Pursuit of excellence and exquisite nature

> The ways of an exquisite man is like of water which benefits all things without contention. He is content to keep which is discarded by the multitude. Hence he is close to the Truth. He adapts himself to any environment; he attunes his mind to what is profound; he associates himself with the virtuous; his words inspire confidence. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 8, translated by Cheng, 1995)

Lao Tzu regards an individual of excellent nature as being able to adapt to every kind of social environment. S/he is able to inspire the wisdom of others.

Transcendence from emotion and human limitation

By means of this infinite point of view, one can transcend oneself from one's emotion and human limitation (Fung, 1948). This point of view is fully reflected in Chuang Tzu's description about his attitude towards his wife's death.

> At the very beginning, she was not living, having no form, nor even substance. But somehow or other there was then her substance, then her form, and then her life. Now by a further change, she has died. The whole process is like the sequence of the four seasons, spring, summer autumn, and winter. While she is thus lying in the great mansion of the universe, for me to go about weeping and wailing would be to proclaim myself ignorant of the natural laws. Therefore I stop. (Chuang Tzu in Fung, 1948)

Transcendence from other perceptions and influence

In the eyes of Lao Tzu, an individual with an infinite point of view is able to transcend himself or herself from others' influence in his or her pursuit of absolute happiness and exquisite

nature. Possessing a subtle and penetrating intelligence, the sage is profound, tolerant, immeasurable and everlasting.

The perfect man has no self, the spiritual man has no achievement, and the true sage has no name'. (Chuang Tzu, Happiness Excursion, in Chang, 1990)

ANALYSIS OF TAOISTIC CHINESE CONCEPTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The Taoistic concept of mental health can be summarized as shown in Figure 1. Comparing modern concepts of mental health, Taoism may be different in several ways.

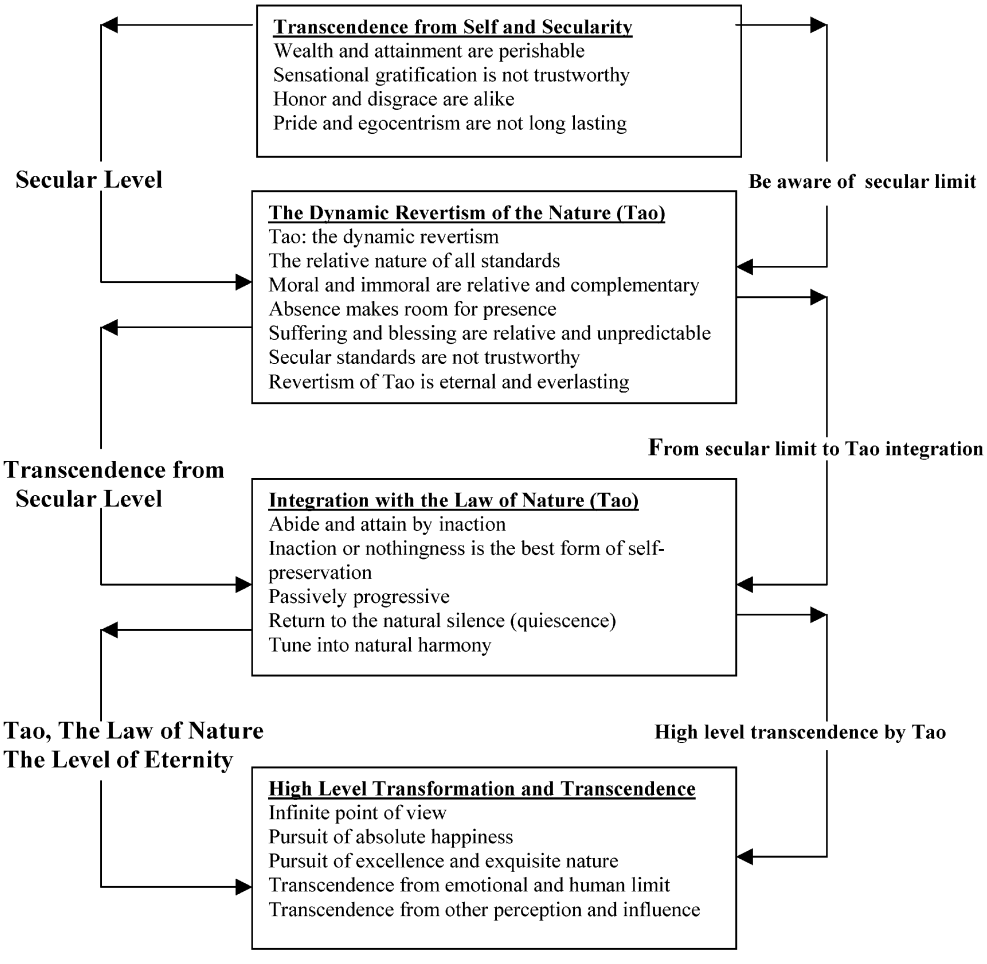

Figure 1. Mental health concept of classical Taoism by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu

Self-development vs self-transcendence

Modern western concepts of mental health emphasize manifesting individual potentials and actualizing a positive state of mind and self-image (Thackery *et al*., 1979; Gilbert, 1992: 43; McCulloch & Boxer, 1997). In Taoism, the meaning of self-image and self-evaluation is no longer important. Instead, one should transcend oneself from honor and disgrace, from pride and egocentrism.

Social attainment vs the Law of Nature

Social attainment in forms of social functioning, adjustment and achievement is crucial in formulating the mental health of an individual (Clare, 1976; DSM IV; Gilbert, 1992). In Taoism, social attainment is untrustworthy and temporary. Moral and immoral standards are not reliable. Honor and disgrace are alike. Thus, one should transcend oneself from social attainment to the Law of Nature and have real peace in mind.

Progressive endeavor vs inaction

Modern mental health concepts advocate individual progressive endeavor in terms of self-competence, and assertiveness in personal pursuit (Gilbert, 1992; McCulloch & Boxer, 1997). In Taoism, all personal endeavors are in vain in comparing the dynamics and revertism of the Law of Nature. One should be integrated into the Law of Nature by remaining in a state of inaction or 'natural silence' (quiescence). This is the best way for an individual's self-preservation in facing changes as well releasing one's natural potentials.

Personal interpretation vs infinite frame of reference

Modern concepts of mental health emphasize personal interpretation and subjective feeling of well being (Diener *et al*., 1999). However, Taoism encourages one to have an infinite frame of reference in the form of a high level of transcendence. One should pursue absolute and ultimate happiness. Instead of being confined by human limitation, one should transcend from life and death and secular standards. One should also pursue subtle and penetrating intelligence and profoundness which cannot be understood by ordinary man; as Chuang Tzu said, '*The perfect man has no self, the spiritual man has no achievement, and the true sage has no name*.'

IMPACTS ON MENTAL HEALTH OF CHINESE COMMUNITIES

In considering the impacts of traditional Taoism on the mental health of the Chinese communities, we have to answer the following questions:

1. What is the cultural diversity of different types of Chinese communities? To what extent does traditional Taoism influence each type of Chinese community?
2. What are the impacts of traditional Chinese mental health concepts on the help-seeking, stress and coping, and the meaning of life of different types of Chinese communities?
3. How would traditional Chinese culture influence culturally sensitive and culturally competent professionals in working with different types of Chinese communities?

Cultural diversity and cultural impact in Chinese communities

Among the world population with Chinese ethnicity, there is a large diversity among various groups of Chinese communities (Lin *et al*., 1995). Generally speaking, there are three main types of Chinese communities.

1. The Chinese communities in a Chinese society where traditional Chinese culture is the dominant culture (for example, remote country life in Mainland China, village life in Taiwan and in Hong Kong) (Fei, 1984).
2. The Chinese communities in a bicultural society where both the Chinese culture and western culture are emphasized. However, Chinese culture, in terms of language, values and ideologies seems to be the priority culture for most of the population (for example, city life in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) (Yang, 1995; Yang, 1997).
3. The Chinese communities in a multicultural city where Chinese is the ethnic minority (for example, Chinese communities in Canada, the UK, the USA and Australia). Chinese culture in terms of language, living style, values and ideologies is restricted to only the family and Chinese communities (Sue & Sue, 1990a, 1990b; Sue, 1997; Sue, 1988).

It seems that the impact of traditional Taoism may be the strongest in the first type of Chinese communities. Its impact on the second type of Chinese communities may be intermingled with modern western culture. For the third type of Chinese communities, its impact may be limited to within Chinese families or kinship groups.

Regarding the type of influence of traditional Chinese culture, particularly Taoism and Confucianism, there are various ways. It may be the mother culture in which the individual adheres to it in building his or her self-image, social circle, and media in cognition, language and communication (Fei, 1984). Or there may be the priority culture model in which Chinese culture seems to be the primary cultural frame within the Chinese communities (Yang, 1995; Yang, 1997). Members of these communities are accustomed to absorb western culture into the primary Chinese culture. Finally, there is the frame-switching model (LaFromboise *et al*., 1993; Hong *et al*., 2000). Individuals in a bicultural or multicultural society have internalized two or more cultural frames in which they can interpret different cultural meanings from different cultural icons. That means traditional Chinese culture, including Taoism, may be only one of those cultural frames internalized by the individuals. Furthermore, even within the same Chinese communities, individual members of different ages, interests, knowledge and experience of traditional Chinese culture may interpret Taoism differently.

Impact on the mental health of the Chinese communities

The impact of traditional Taoism on the religious coping and mental health of various types of Chinese Communities is summarized in Table 1.

As there are great diversities of Chinese culture among different types of Chinese communities and among individuals of different experience, age and knowledge of Chinese culture, the writer tries to illustrate the influence of traditional Chinese concepts of mental health by a case illustration in the following section.

Table 1
Impact on the mental health of the Chinese communities

	Impacts on the first type Chinese communities within Chinese society/ or persons regarding Chinese culture as their Mother culture	**Impacts on the second type Chinese communities within bicultural society/ or persons regarding Chinese culture as their priority culture**	**Impacts on the third type of Chinese communities within multicultural society in which Chinese is the ethnic minority/or persons regarding Chinese culture only as one of their culture frames**
Western self-development vs Taoistic self-transcendence	Individuals may be more **inclined to Taoistic self-transcendence** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may shift **between self-development and self-transcendence** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may be **more inclined to western self-development** in stress and coping and the meaning of life
Western self-attainment vs Taoistic integration of the Law of Nature	Individuals may be more **inclined to Taoistic integration with the Law of Nature** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may shift **between self-attainment and Taoistic integration of the Law of Nature** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may be **more inclined to western self-attainment** in stress and coping and the meaning of life
Western progressive self-endeavor vs Taoistic inaction	Individuals may be more **inclined to Taoistic inaction** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may shift **between progressive self-endeavor and inaction** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may be **more inclined to western progressive self-endeavor** in stress and coping and the meaning of life
Western personal interpretation vs Taoistic infinite frame of reference	Individuals may be more **inclined to Taoistic infinite frame of reference** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may shift **between personal interpretation and infinite frame of reference** in stress and coping and the meaning of life	Individuals may be **more inclined to western personal interpretation** in stress and coping and the meaning of life

The case illustration

Advantages and limitations of a single case illustration

The writer is fully aware that there are limitations in generalizing discussion from a single Chinese family to members in different types of Chinese communities. Nevertheless, a case illustration still has the following advantages.

1. In this case, different members of the family may represent different types of influence of traditional Taoism as well as modern western mental health concepts.
2. It provides a valid example to show how family members with various perceptions of traditional Taoism interact with one another.
3. It shows how different interpretations of Taoism are formulated by different life experiences within a Chinese family.

In fact, case study is frequently used as a research methodology in social science. It has the following natures and advantages as described by Yin (1994):

> A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 1994: 13)

However, the case described in this paper was only a clinical record of a case done by the writer. Thus, it has the following limitations and constraints.

1. The situation described in this case can not be generalized to members in different Chinese communities.
2. It cannot serve as a research tool to generate theories in describing impacts of influences of Taoism on Chinese communities.

Within all these constraints, the Chinese family described in this paper serves only as an initial exploration and illustration to show how Taoism affects the mental health of a Chinese family.

A Chinese family after the torture of the Cultural Revolution

As a volunteer social worker, the writer had dealt with the following case in a social welfare agency in Australia, which was a social welfare agency affiliated to a Church for ethnic minorities in Sydney. To protect clients' confidentiality, their identity and personal information are disguised.

> Mr B was born in a small village in Mainland China in the 1950s. In the 1960s, his own family was classified as the 'Black Fives' (a political stereotype of the potential enemies of the Communist Party that includes the rich, the landlord, the merchant, the learned and the previous soldiers of the Old China before Communist China). His mother was tortured to death by the 'Red Guards' in the Cultural Revolution. His father was locked up in a political reformatory for five years. B and his two younger sisters were under the care of his uncle who was a poor farmer in a rural village. One year later, his youngest sister died in a high fever. B and his younger sister suffered a lot after that. They always starved for a few days and were labeled by others as the offspring of the Black Fives. In 1980, Mr B sneaked into Australia as an illegal immigrant and hid within a Chinese restaurant. He had to work day and night for three years to pay off his debt for his illegal voyage to Australia. Fortunately, under the Amnesty of the Australian Commonwealth Government, he was able to gain legal permanent residency as well as citizenship in Australia. He then worked very hard and saved enough money to open a fast food shop in 1984. Then he married one of his neighbors in his mother village in Mainland China. One year later, they had their first son. Unfortunately, he was moderately intellectually retarded. By then, Mrs B suffered from postnatal depression. Two years later, she gave birth to a baby girl who was a lovely normal child. However, Mrs B's depression prevailed.

She was unable to cope with the demanding work in taking care of her two children as well as selling food in the fast food shop. Later, B's father arrived Australia. He eased B's heavy workload in the fast food shop. Two years later, B's grandmother settled in Australia. She helped B's wife to do the household chores. Also, B's cousin Mary came to Australia to study in an Australian university. By the time the writer encountered them, B's daughter was 13 years old and her elder brother was 14 years old.

The impact of Taoism on the mental health of the Chinese family

B's family members lived in a multicultural society in Australia. Nevertheless, the impacts of traditional Taoism on their religious coping and mental health were different.

Impacts on the help-seeking behaviors of the Chinese

Traditional Taoism may have a crucial impact on the help-seeking behaviors of the Chinese. Taoism may help Chinese to transcend to a high order integration with the Law of Nature. Everything happens naturally. One should not try to alter or change the arrangement of Nature. In the same way, B's father and his grandmother thought that it was not necessary to ask for others' help even in their difficult time. Compared with B's father, B and his wife were less internalized by Taoism, they wanted to ask for others' help. However, they withdrew as there were racial discrimination and language problems in their help-seeking process. As a consequence, they preferred self-endurance in facing hardships and sufferings.

B approached the writer for help. He worried about the mental health condition of his wife. With the advice of the writer, B's wife was under the proper treatment of a psychiatrist. The writer visited their family and had a good sharing of views with B's father and his grandmother. Both of them were well-educated scholars. B's father was an agricultural scientist and B's grandmother was a previous Chinese scholar in Taoism. They were fully internalized by Taoism. They thought that B's wife was unable to transcend her sufferings and hardships. They told the writer that integration with the law of nature could give one extra strengths in facing tortures. They said that both Taoism and Buddhism were the spiritual power of Chinese. Instead of asking for external help or being frustrated by the present situations, one should transcend from secular temptation and frustration. Being less influenced by traditional Taoism, B thought that self-transcendence was only an unreachable ideal. Instead, one had to face the constraints in reality. He felt powerless and helpless in Australian life. He wanted to ask for others' help but what he encountered was only discrimination and unfair treatment. So he had to endure, hoping that the situation might be better in the future.

Impacts on the stress and coping of the Chinese

Lee (1995) reviewed related studies and concluded that most Chinese tend to use traditional coping mechanisms, Feng Shui (a kind of ancient fortune telling based on the power of Yen Yang in nature), Yuan (events happen according to the pattern arranged by the Law of Nature instead by us) and endurance in facing stress. Chinese people change their beliefs and cognition but not the stressful environment in coping (Lee, 1995; Cheung, 1995; Cheng, 1995). In terms of Taoism, they transcend themselves from self and secularity to

the infinite Tao and the Law of Nature. Being deeply influenced by Taoism, B's father seemed to transcend himself from prolonged torture in the Cultural Revolution. Taoism helped him to endure sufferings, and resolve internal anger and frustration. He believed that wealth and attainment were perishable; honor and disgrace were alike; blessing and suffering were similar. His narration follows.

> B's father said 'I was born in the Mainland when there were wars and confusions. People were killed in the wars and starved to death. My father was very rich, and my mother was a famous scholar in Taoism in a famous university in China. However, my family fortune was ruined by the invasion of Japanese. My father was dead in the war. My mother brought me to the USA when I was about twenty. I studied hard at Yale University and later became a scholar in one of the universities in the States. As I was trained to be an agricultural scientist, I decided to contribute what I learnt to the new establishment of the People's Republic of China by the Communist Party. Together with my mother, I went back to China hoping to contribute what I learnt to my mother country. I was so committed that I was willing to work in rural villages and in remote mountain areas. Life was so tough there. Unfortunately, the Red Guard wrongly interpreted my commitment as the "spy of the USA" in the Cultural Revolution. To admit my wrong deeds, they ordered me to kneel on sharp glass. My wife was unable to face the torture and committed suicide. I was locked up in a political reformatory for five years. I wanted to die but my mother who was a scholar in Taoism comforted me by saying that honor and disgrace were alike; wealth and attainment are perishable; at the end of sufferings there may be blessings (Lao Tzu). The wisdom of Taoism supported me to face the torture in the reformatory. My mind felt peaceful. Inaction in Taoism seemed to be the first way to face the unchangeable life torture.'

Nevertheless, being less influenced by Taoism, B was deeply frustrated by his tortures in the Cultural Revolution. He was so angry with the Red Guard. He tried to escape from his unpleasant memories by sneaking into Australia. Fortunately, his belief in Taoism gave him hope in facing his hardship of being an illegal immigrant.

> B said 'I hated them. I hated the Cultural Revolution. They ruined my family. They killed my beloved mother. They made my younger sister die of high fever. I could not forget the day when my father kneeled on sharp broken glass. Right now, I still have nightmares dreaming that the Red Guard killed my family members. I wanted to retaliate. To avoid recalling all those bad memories, I sneaked into Australia. I was an illegal immigrant for many years before I could regain my permanent residency. For me, life is a torture. If my father still stayed in the USA my whole life should be different. I understand that Taoism gave my father and my grandmother extra transcending power to face torture. In fact, though I still have unresolved anger towards my hardships, Taoism gave me strengths while I was an illegal immigrant. I tried to convince myself that the end of my sufferings would be blessings. I believed that my blessings came. I had my own fast food shop. I told my wife to learn more from Taoism so that she could accept the fate of having a mentally retarded son. My cousin and my daughter do not believe in Taoism. They though that in Australian society, you have to assert yourself. You have to advocate for your own rights in facing oppression and racial discrimination.'

Impacts on the purpose and meaning of life of the Chinese

Instead of self-actualization (Maslow, 1960) and self-development, in terms of Taoism, the meaning of life for the Chinese may incline to a harmonious relationship with the infinite Tao and the Law of Nature. They prefer inaction, self-endurance and tolerance within hardships, tortures and sufferings. They prefer passively egocentric preservation for survival and prosperity. The meaning of life was different among family members of B.

> Regarding the meaning of life, B frankly admitted that the most important life goal for him was to earn a decent living for his family. He knew that Australian society had a lot of unfair treatment and racial discrimination to ethnic minorities including the Chinese. However, all he could do is to endure and be inactive with a result of passive egocentrism for individual and family survival and prosperity. B's cousin was a university student in Australia. She preferred to be a registered solicitor in Australia so that she could advocate human rights for Chinese minorities. B's daughter was a high school student in Australia. She wanted to be a medical practitioner in the future. She said that she had to actualize herself in a competitive society like Australia. B's father and grandmother were faithful believers of Taoism. They said that life was actually a dream as Chuang Tzu described. B's father said when he recalled his past history, honor and disgrace, blessings and sufferings, good and evil all happened altogether. His return to Communist China seemed to be a personal honor but ended up as a disgrace in the political reformatory. However, the sufferings in the reformatory purified his mind and transcended him to a high order of inner peace, free from secular reputation and worries. To him, the meaning of life is inner peace, inaction, and even a state of quiescence in his mind and body. As an opposite, B's wife said she had a lot of worries. She was afraid that her husband's business was sooner or later to be ruined by racial discrimination by those 'white gangsters' nearby. She worried that her younger daughter was not diligent enough to be admitted by the university. She was anxious about the deteriorating health condition of her father-in-law and her grandmother-in-law. She worried about the future of his intellectually retarded son. In regarding all these worries, she could do nothing except praying to the Taoistic God worshipped by their family. For her, the meaning of life was to endure and sustain all these worries.

It is clear that traditional Taoism has different impacts on the mental health of B's family members. B's father and grandmother internalized Taoism as their ideology in facing hardship and sufferings. Self-transcendence and integration with the Law of Nature were their meaning of life and religious coping mechanism. B and his wife were partly influenced by Taoism. In facing their stress, hardship and sufferings, they could transcend themselves to a high order of peacefulness, but they seemed to adopt passive endurance, inaction and egocentric survival from Taoism. Finally, B's cousin and younger daughter seemed to be less influenced by Taoism. They inclined to western concepts of mental health, self-development, self-attainment and progressive endeavor as their meaning of life and coping mechanism.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL PRACTICE

As a conclusion, this paper discusses the impacts of Taoism on mental health and religious coping of Chinese communities. By means of a case illustration, the writer shows how Taoism still has significant impacts on the help-seeking behaviors, coping, and meaning of life of the Chinese. However, individuals of different ages, sexes, knowledge and experiences of Chinese culture may have different interpretations of traditional Chinese culture. All these may have important implications for culturally sensitive or culturally competent mental health practice within Chinese communities.

In fact, culturally sensitive and culturally competent orientations in counseling and psychotherapy imply two different perspectives in interpreting the impacts of traditional Taoism on the mental health of Chinese communities (Cheatham *et al*., 1993; Draguns, 1989, 1996; Pedersen, 1985; Jackson, 1975; Locke, 1990; Sue, 1981; Sue *et al*., 1998; Sue & Sue, 1990a, 1990b; Yip, 2001). Culturally sensitive practice implies a universal orientation in perceiving the cultural difference between traditional Chinese concepts and modern western concepts of mental health (Cheatham *et al*., 1993; Draguns, 1989, 1996; Sue, 1981; Sue & Sue, 1990a, 1990b). Culturally competent practice implies a specific orientation in perceiving the cultural difference between traditional Chinese concepts and modern western concepts of mental health (Jackson, 1975; Locke, 1990; Yip, 2001; Cheatham *et al*., 1993). Within a universal orientation, a counselor or psychotherapist tends to think that the perceived impacts of the traditional Chinese culture are intermingled with the impacts of age, sex and class natures. For instance, B's father and grandmother's attitude towards suffering and meaning of life and their help-seeking behaviors were also influenced by their age and personal experiences. The focus of the intervention should be on open mindedness to traditional Taoism and empathetic attitude with their life torture rather than understanding Taoism and the history of the Cultural Revolution in detail. Nevertheless, a culturally specific orientation assumes that sufficient understanding of specific details of Taoism as well as the Cultural Revolution is necessary. Without these, it would be hard for counselors and psychotherapist to build up rapport with B's father and grandmother and understand their real feelings and religious coping mechanism in facing their hardships, sufferings and torture.

In fact, both the universal and the specific model of cultural mental health practice can be applied in working with Chinese communities. It all depends on the extent of the impacts of traditional Chinese culture on individual clients as well as their openness to the dominant culture within a multicultural society. For instance, B's father and grandmother were deeply internalized by traditional Taoism. They did not think that a professional worker without such knowledge or background could really understand their situation. In that situation, only a professional worker with the same mother culture, identity and knowledge and belief in Taoism could establish a good relationship with them. For B and his wife, they had limited contact with the Australian culture through running their fast food shop. They could communicate with a non-Chinese speaking professional worker. However, they might not be willing to share their problems and feelings with a psychotherapist or counselor who does not have specific understanding of the Chinese culture, in particular Taoism. Even if the professional worker was culturally sensitive, warm and genuine to listen to their story, they might assume a 'white' could not understand a 'Chinese' mind with Taoistic orientation. Nevertheless, Mrs B's daughter and his cousin were inclined to Australian culture. She might

welcome a non-Chinese social worker with a transcultural mind who was open enough to share her views, feelings and problems in her family, especially her viewpoints which were different from her parents and grandparents. Finally, this paper is only an initial exploration of the effect of Taoism on the mental health of Chinese communities. Further research is necessary to pursue a better understanding in this area.

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