

Report from Beijing: Family Therapy in the People's Republic of China

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 “May you live in interesting times.” - *Confucius*

In September 2009 I began a year-long Fulbright Research Award through the US State Department to work with the Universities in Beijing and across China to collaborate in the development of graduate psychology at the University level. The focus of the project is the development of psychology and couples and family therapy services through research and service work, and to promote cross-cultural exchange of ideas between the US and China. Before my departure for China the Eugene Metro Rotary Club gave me a grand send-off, and honored me with membership to Rotary International. My parents were both Rotary members, and I grew up hearing about the important work of members around the world. My membership with Rotary is a great honor for me, and I am looking forward to meeting with some of the Beijing Rotary members during my year in China. For me, the project in China fit perfectly with Rotary's mission of “the advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of... professional persons united in the ideal of service.”

China in Context

China's rapid economic and social developments in the last decade have brought new wealth and prosperity, as well as new social challenges. Couples and Family Therapy is a very popular for the Chinese people, as the focus on family and community connectedness is key central to Chinese culture. China's attitude toward psychology changed dramatically after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Political and economic reforms initiated in the years between 1978 and 1986 facilitated the revitalization of

Chinese psychiatry and its reengagement with Western scientific communities. Recent growth in the area of psychology in China has been fueled by the government's recent acknowledgment of the social burden caused by mental health problems and a variety of state-sponsored initiatives to improve access to psychological services in the country's hospitals, schools, and prisons.

With China's rapid transformation from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society since the "Open Door Policy" and economic reforms of the 1980s, dramatic changes are occurring in people's daily lives. These transitions are influencing the structure and attitudes of the Chinese family and have implications for the future of culturally academic collaborations with the west.

During the first part of my journey in China I traveled around the country to deliver lectures and meet with faculty and students to discuss issues relevant to Chinese families. Some of the topics discussed included diversity issues in Chinese culture. It is a popular myth that China is comprised of a single culture. In reality, there are over 56 clearly identified different ethnic groups in China. China currently has 5 major language families and 129 different languages, excluding dialects or sub-dialects. Other topics include the implications of the one child policy that was initiated in 1979 in an effort to reduce the population. The policy consists of a set of regulations that include restrictions on family size, late marriage and childbearing, and the spacing of children in cases in which second children are permitted. Other issues discussed include son-preference in Chinese culture. Although the one-child policy has been estimated to have reduced population growth in the country of 1.3 billion by as much as 300 million people over its first twenty years, it has also brought on a host of unintended consequences. Probably the most well-known consequence of the one-child policy is China's sex ratio. The sex ratio at birth ranges from 1.03 to 1.07 in industrialized countries. Before the implementation of the policy in 1979, the reported sex ratio in China was 1.06 nationwide. This grew to 1.11 in 1988 and 1.17 in 2001. Son preference is still the dominant mode, especially in rural China and among the poor. Other issues discussed include the problem of academic achievement pressure for the young, the rise in internet addiction, and the rising divorce rate which has grown to the level of the US in the last decade. Part of the work in China will include the study of these issues and possible means of intervention where appropriate.

Through the support of my colleagues at the University of Oregon's College of Education and the Office of International Programs the hope is to continue academic and research collaborations with China into the future. This will include promoting scholarly and student exchanges and service work with China as we move into the next chapter of history. The rapid economic and social changes in Chinese culture are reminiscent of the ancient Confucian saying, "May you live in interesting times." It is debated whether is meant to be a curse or a blessing as the word "interesting" can have many meanings, yet I prefer to look at it positively in the context of contemporary China. These are indeed interesting times with the creation of new ways to connect and collaborate internationally. The world grows smaller with international travel getting easier and easier, bringing us together with bullet trains and jet airplanes. I look forward to the opportunities and challenges this will bring, in the spirit of one of Rotary's fundamental missions to "expand humanitarian reach around the globe and to promote world understanding and peace."



Dr. Miller and sons Joseph and Alex at Shaanxi Normal University, China