TRANSLATORS OF THE SOUL: BINGHAM DAI, POW-MENG YAP, AND THE MAKING OF TRANSCULTURAL PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

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Upon telling friends and colleagues that my current research centers on the history of psychoanalysis, I often meet a blatant reaction: Can we take psychoanalysis seriously? Indeed, psychoanalysis as an object of study does not sit well at the crossroads of several disciplines. Medical anthropologists prefer a more expansive approach to understanding the diversity of mental health practice. Psychotherapy, counseling, and biological psychiatry are some of the more familiar terrains in which mental distress has been managed.[1] Rather than focusing on psychic implications, sociologists have questioned the social expansion of medical jurisdiction – the process whereby previously non-medical problems, including psychological ones, are turned into treatable conditions (Conrad, 2007; Clarke *et al.*, 2010). In the history and philosophy of science, psychoanalysis is ranked low as a 'soft science,' if it can be considered a scientific practice at all, relative to the physical and natural sciences.[2] And given my regional expertise, I have rarely come across researchers of transpacific Asia who are interested in the subject. The notable exceptions are the group of

1. On the anthropology of mental health in China, see Chen (2003), Huang (2014), Kuan (2020), Ng (2020), Zhang (2020).

2. Historian John Forrester (1996) has argued that psychoanalysis obeys the law of scientific persuasion in a way irreducible to the normative mode with which the natural or social sciences operate. See also Mayer (2017).

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Psychoanalysis and History 23.2 (2021): 161–185
DOI: 10.3366/pah.2021.0380

www.euppublishing.com/pah

literary scholars who employ psychoanalytic theory to critique texts and their contexts.[3]

Yet few would deny the way ideas such as repression or the unconscious permeate our lives. Because my project entails the scrutiny of life narratives, I am increasingly convinced of the importance of psychoanalysis and its history. At present I am working on an intellectual biography of Bingham Dai 戴秉衡 (1899–1996), whom I label the first Chinese psychoanalyst due to the nature of his clinical interest and practice.[4] Born in Gutian, Fujian in 1899, Dai received his PhD in sociology at the University of Chicago in 1937, practiced psychotherapy at the most prestigious and best teaching hospital in Republican China (1911–49), Peking Union Medical College (PUMC), from 1935 to 1939, and worked in the psychiatry department at Duke University from 1943 until his retirement in 1969.[5] He died in North Carolina in 1996, having made two brief visits back to China in 1944 and 1982. Throughout his career, Dai integrated competing intellectual traditions into his practice and argued for the benefit of their mutual enlightenment.

Dai's work developed a style of science that I call *transcultural reasoning*, which implemented cultural factors to mediate between universal and particular forms of knowledge making. This way of thinking conditioned an 'epistemic virtue' that grounded scientific practice in the disciplined self and its centrality to the achievement of knowledge (Daston & Gallison, 2007). In the context of the human sciences, transcultural researchers drew on the power of cultural narratives to elucidate the unconscious mind across different historical and geographical settings. The subversive nature of this new scientific style holds both a hypothetical and a transgressive promise in relation to other styles of scientific thinking in the European tradition that have been discussed by such historical philosophers of science as Alistair Crombie (1994), Ian Hacking (2002, 2009), and Arnold Davidson (2001).

This new style of science is distinguished by at least six features. First, transcultural reasoning debunks the assumption that western biomedical categories are universally applicable. Second, it treats thinking across geographical borders as the basis of evidence in the production of knowledge. Third, its methodology tends to be interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary in nature. Fourth, it repositions its practitioners from the margin to the center of mainstream scholarly discourses. Fifth, like all styles of scientific reasoning, it establishes new objects and parameters of scientific inquiry. Lastly, it can overlap with other styles of science

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3. In modern Chinese studies, the most sustained treatment of the subject can be found in Zhang (1992). See tributes to Jingyuan Zhang in this issue pp. 217–226. See also Wang (1997), Shih (2001), Tsu (2005), Lee (2006), Larson (2009).

4. For earlier historical studies of Dai from which my work extends, see Blowers (2004), Wang (2006), Rose (2009), Chen (2014).

5. On the history of Peking Union Medical College, see Bullock (1980).

(e.g. taxonomy, statistical logic, or reasoning in cases), but they are not mutually inclusive. For instance, classical psychoanalysis in the West also foregrounds case studies, but it does not necessarily have a cross-cultural component in the way that transcultural psychiatry does.

While transcultural reasoning has been a common scientific practice, the scope of my study is more circumscribed.[6] By taking the Asia Pacific region as its point of departure, my aim is to shed light on the contribution of non-western actors and cultures to the transformation of psychoanalysis. As revealed through Dai's biography and the manifold lives within which it was nested, the emergence of this new style of scientific reasoning recasts the foundation of disparate scholarly disciplines. Its history reflects the grounds on which new ideas and key stakeholders shifted the profile of mental health science in the twentieth century and, more importantly, the profile of how such narratives are constituted for contemporary historical thinking.

Biography in Psychoanalysis

Biography has been a realm where psychoanalysis and history meet since the time of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) (Mack, 1971).[7] On the most fundamental level, Freud offered a range of conceptual tools and practical techniques for the interpretation of subjective life. This trend reached its peak with the rise of psychohistory in the 1970s, but it has arguably plateaued since. Though it may seem counterintuitive to return to life stories today, I wish to begin with some remarks on the value of this medium for the study of psychoanalytic history, especially from an East Asian viewpoint.

First, a study of Dai's intellectual trajectory exceeds a limited understanding of biography. Academic historians tend to relegate biographies to an inferior status (Nasaw, 2009). Despite such resistance, a wave of 'new biographies' has blossomed since the 1990s (Margadant, 2000b). Part of this renaissance has to do with the way biographies, as opposed to traditional history monographs, reach a broader audience. Yet good biographies, like good histories, maneuver the fine line between facts, interpretation, and imagination (Banner, 2009). Furthermore, given that my protagonist is Chinese, the approach of biography seems even more appropriate. As gender historian Susan Mann has argued, not only is Chinese historiography replete with a preference for biographical narrativity, (classical)

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6. My project presents Dai as an important interlocutor in what could be considered a broader, more diffused project arising in many places over the last century. I thank Matt ffytche and the journal's anonymous reader for suggesting this framing. For studies of transcultural mental health in Francophone Africa, see Bullard (2005); Fassin & Rechtman (2005); and Anderson *et al.* (2011b).

7. On the relationship between psychoanalysis and autobiography, with the case episteme serving as its fulcrum, see ffytche (2020).

Chinese sources 'also lend themselves perfectly to use by the biographer' (Mann, 2009, p. 632).

For these reasons, I often view my work on Dai as an example of what labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris calls 'anti-biography.' 'Rather than offering history as background, or introducing it in order to locate an individual in time,' Kessler-Harris urges us to 'ask how the individual life helps us to make sense of a piece of historical process' (2009, p. 626). In this sense, the life of a biographical subject forms a lens through which we can grasp the broader social and cultural processes of change over time. In her introduction to *The New Biography*, Jo Burr Margadant went so far as to assert that 'no one 'invents' a self apart from cultural notions available to them in a particular historical setting' (Margadant, 2000a, p. 2). An individual's life experience is both small and big – small in the sense that a biography typically focuses on the ordinary experience of a given person, but big in the sense that how the person's story unfolds is always saturated in macro-structural determinants of meaning-making.

In addition to addressing the concerns of historical practice, biographies engender revisionism, which sits at the heart of historiography. My work on Dai is the fruit of an entire generation of scholars in feminist and critical race studies who shifted the focus of our inquiries from the powerful to the powerless. Biographies have benefited from this 'history from below' approach, which opens up endless possible subjects for biographical study. Every research project needs a compelling rationale. The lives of ordinary individuals are of course no less important than kings and presidents, but for the purpose of choosing a subject of intellectual pursuit, scholars need to explain the 'so what' question. Viewed in this light, Dai's professional legacy pushes us to rethink the history of psychoanalysis itself. If psychoanalysis, as historian John Forrester has suggested, 'promises a new way of telling a life in the 20th century … [and] render[s] that way of telling a life public, making it scientific' (Forrester, 1996, p. 10), Dai's transcultural reasoning takes this a step further. It exposes the ways in which this 'science' – whether as a psychology, a science of the emotions, or the empiricist investigation of the unconscious – is very much shaped by local cultural discourses. Psychoanalytic inquiry necessarily embodies a transcultural orientation. Therefore, biography is not just part of the inner content of the case history style; it is the point where transcultural differences and mediations are most easily exposed.[8]

This transcultural angle reconsiders the claim that psychoanalysis is an invention of western bourgeois modernity. To the extent that we can trace the field's genealogy to Freud and his interlocutors, this impression is partially valid.[9] Yet scholarship from the last decade has also shed light on the history of psychoanalysis in non-western and colonial contexts. Many of Freud's crucial

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8. I thank Matt ffytche for suggesting this point to me.

9. For informative overviews, see Ellenberger (1970), Mitchell & Black (1995), Zaretsky (2004), Maraki (2008).

concepts, including the 'dark' frontiers of female sexuality, the unconscious, totem, primitive societies, and civilization, are rooted in the ideologies of European expansion.[10] In the 1920s and 1930s, two psychoanalytic societies were established in Japan (Tokyo and Sendai) and one in India (Taketomo, 1990; Harding, 2009). Branches of academic psychology and Islamic theological-medical reasoning indebted to Freudian ideas flourished in the Arab world, especially in Egypt and Morocco (El Shakry, 2017; Pandolfo, 2018). In the Cold War era, ethnopsychoanalysts reinvented their discipline by leaving their practice in Europe and conducting fieldwork in West Africa and the Southwest Pacific. Some of the leading figures, such as Fritz Morgenthaler (1919–84), became heroes of the New Left youth in the 1970s and 1980s (Herzog, 2017, pp. 179–211). Throughout the twentieth century, psychoanalysis thrived in Eastern Europe, South Africa, and Latin America, with a notable presence in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico (Plotkin, 2001; Damousi & Plotkin, 2009; Gallo, 2010; Antic, 2016; Truscott & Hook, 2016). This wave of revisionist scholarship suggests that we can no longer ignore the role of non-western cultures in the provenance and development of psychoanalysis. Tracking Dai's personal and professional trajectory over time allows for certain coeval negotiations between western and Asian cultures to come into view. These features operate outside the window of the conventional framing of psychoanalysis as something primarily exported from the West to the rest. They shift the focus of historiographical attention from the reception to the *production* of psychoanalysis in unexpected locations.

China and Historical Revisionism

It may come as a surprise that the world's most populous country has been left out of this wave of revisionism, but a close study of Dai's intellectual evolution changes that. Such a focus allows us to answer a question over which historians of the non-western world have long stumbled: Why would a foreign system of ideas such as psychoanalysis gain a foothold in China?[11] To address this question properly, it is essential to acknowledge the different strands of psychoanalysis that flourished in the global interbellum. For a native-born Chinese analyst like Dai, the appeal of psychoanalysis was rooted less in traditional Freudianism than its sociocultural variant. The latter modification of psychoanalysis – which has been loosely called 'neo-Freudianism' – resonated with Dai's passion to explore the

10. See the essays in Anderson *et al.* (2011b), Damousi & Plotkin (2012), ffytche & Pick (2016). On Eastern Europe, see Miller (1998), Antic (2017). On the British Empire, see Linstrum (2016).

11. Existing historical overviews tend to neglect this question. While rich in its description of the key actors and texts involved in the reception of psychoanalysis in early twentieth-century China, they tend to sidestep the *content* of the psychoanalytic clinic in the Republican era. See, e.g., Zhang (1992), Kirsner & Snyder (2009), Jiang & Ivanhoe (2013), Huang & Kirsner (2020).

full potential of personhood, an interest he cultivated from being educated in the Chinese classics.[12]

Growing up in a Christian family, Dai graduated with a degree in Philosophy and Religion from St. John's University, an Anglican missionary school in Shanghai, in 1923 (see Figure 1).[13] Dai then taught at a modern high school in Tianjin, where he experimented with what he described as 'personality education' (Dai, 1932b, pp. 44–6). He recruited around 50 students into his fellowship, the Society for the Fullest Personal Development. The Chinese name of the fellowship, Jin Xin Hui 盡心會, was taken from the writing of ancient philosopher Mencius 孟子 (372–289 BC).[14] The Society formed mutual-support friendship groups, with each group devising 'its own program helping each other developing along physical, intellectual, and moral lines' (Dai, 1932b, p. 45). Dai met with fellowship students in groups, as well as individually, to work out their problems together. In the fall of 1924, Dai left Tianjin in order to teach at the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute established by the New Confucianist Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) (Alitto, 1979). Dai was attracted to the holistic vision of the human person promoted at the Institute (Dai, 1932b, pp. 46–8). Liang's program departed from the mainstream intellectual tide during the May Fourth era, which featured a concerted attack on Confucianism.[15] In Shandong, Dai worked with Liang to inculcate students with the Confucian moral virtue of *ren* ('love for one's fellow humans') and build a *relational* approach to helping them resolve their personal issues (Dai, 1932b, p. 47). Building on this series of experiments in personality education, Dai went on to do graduate work, with funding from the Fujian provincial government, at the University of Chicago in the 1930s (see Figure 2). He deepened his interest in personality studies during his time in the United States (Atkins, n.d., pp. 1–2).

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12. The key architects of neo-Freudianism include Alfred Adler (1870–1973), Eric Erickson (1902–94), Carl Jung (1875–1961), and Karen Horney (1885–1952), all of whom challenged the centrality Freud placed on the sexual drive in human psychological development. They were interested in the social and cultural dimensions of psychical development and neurosis, with a particular influence on the Culture and Personality school.

13. On the role of St. John's University in shaping the history of Republican Shanghai, see Yeh (1990, pp. 49–88).

14. The original Chinese passage from *Mencius* in which the phrase *jinxin* appeared is: '盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也.' It can be translated as 'He who has exhausted all his mental constitution knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven. To preserve one's mental constitution, and nourish one's nature, is the way to serve Heaven. When neither a premature death nor long life causes a man any double-mindedness, but he waits in the cultivation of his personal character for whatever issue; this is the way in which he establishes his Heaven-ordained being.' See also Wu, in this issue.

15. For relevant discussions of the May Fourth movement, see, e.g., Furth (1970), Schwarcz (1986), Yeh (1990), Lee (1999), Mitter (2004), Lanza (2010).

Figure 1. **Bingham Dai during college days in Shanghai. Courtesy of the Bingham Dai Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Appalachian State University.**

An important turning point in Dai's training occurred in 1932, when he attended the 'Impact of Culture on Personality' seminar convened by anthropologist Edward Sapir (1884–1939) at Yale University (Dai, 1932a) (see Figure 3).[16] In his application letter to Sapir, Dai divulged the seed of his interest in the pursuit of rigorous scientific thinking: 'What is most needed in China as well as in the Orient at large is science, and particularly the right kind of scientific spirit or attitude' (1931a, p. 3). Contrary to the thriving scientism in China that came to prize the modern West as the ultimate or only model to emulate (often via Japan), Dai was

16. On Sapir, see Darnell (1989).

Figure 2. **Bingham Dai at his desk during graduate days in Chicago. Courtesy of the Bingham Dai Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Appalachian State University.**

Figure 3. **Dai (front row) with the Impact of Culture on Personality seminar group at Yale (1932). Courtesy of the Bingham Dai Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Appalachian State University.**

'not satisfied with the wholesale importation of the western education system, and doubt[ed] very much whether it can ever produce genuine scientists and generate the needed scientific attitude' (1931a, p. 3).[17] Instead, he stressed the importance of contextual factors: 'to introduce science to the Orient in a serious manner

presupposes a knowledge of how science came about, how scientists came to be what they are, and some of the *social psychological factors* that make science possible, if not inevitable' (1931a, p. 3). In order to be accepted into the seminar and deliver himself as a representative of Chinese culture, Dai penned an extended autobiography that covered the first 30 years of his life (Dai, 1932b).[18]

At the Yale seminar, Dai also met the neo-Freudian psychiatrist and analyst Harry Stack Sullivan (1892–1949), whose concern for interpersonal relations, as opposed to the classical emphasis on intrapsychic drives, inspired him.[19] As Dai (1982–3) later recalled, 'I was so impressed by [Sullivan's] interpersonal approach to personality problems and his judicious use of psychoanalytic methods that before the week ended, I had obtained his consent to become my first analyst' (p. 12). Dai had always considered personality and self formations as best understood within their sociocultural context (see Dai, 1931b). 'The most important thing for human being aside from biological need,' according to Dai, 'is to become a human being that he can accept […] And to have a productive harmonious relationship with fellow human beings, and I have been taught by the Chinese philosophers ever since Confucius. So, my Confucian background prevented me from accepting the Freudian view, even though I use some of his method [with] great modification' (Atkins, 1986, pp. 1–2). Because Sullivan's approach shared with Confucianism the value placed on social and familial relations, it left an indelible mark on Dai. Dai subsequently decided to undergo analysis with Sullivan (Atkins, n.d., p. 5). In sum, a Chinese variant of psychodynamics came to be crystalized against the backdrop of two concurrent trends: the rise of New Confucianism as a conservative cultural force in China and the turn toward social structural explanations among the neo-Freudian theorists. Dai's career exemplifies the possibilities of psychoanalysis outside the West in a non-incidental way. Whereas the epistemological overlaps between Confucius and Sullivan have been absent in existing accounts of psychoanalysis in Republican China, Dai's experience crucially anchors a cross-cultural mediation of psychoanalysis. To understand the ways in which Dai fashioned a transcultural style of science, a vital clue lies in the concurrent shifts of the intellectual milieus in which thinkers like him came of age.

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17. On scientism in Republican China, see Kwok (1965), Furth (1970). On the way that Japan replaced China as the key conduit of modern scientific knowledge due to the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), see Rogaski (2004), Elman (2005).

18. On the point that Dai was recruited to represent Chinese culture at the Yale seminar, see Atkins (n.d., p. 4).

19. For a reappraisal of Sullivan's work, especially in light of his homosexuality, see Wake (2011).

Beijing Psychoanalytic

One of the reasons that China has been neglected by historians of psychoanalysis is institutional. Unlike its Japanese, Indian, and Argentinian offshoots, the International Psychoanalytic Association had no Chinese counterpart in the first half of the twentieth century. This missing link can be remedied by examining how the psychoanalytic intercultural exchange accrued practical meaning during Dai's tenure at PUMC.[20] As the first Chinese to implement psychotherapy in northern China in the 1930s, Dai stood out in the Republican period because, unlike the *literary* appropriation of Freudian tropes in the writings of Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), and other May Fourth novelists, he took psychoanalysis to the consulting room.[21] Other iconoclastic educators, such as Gao Juefu 高覺敷 (1896–1993), Zhang Jingsheng 張競生 (1888–1970), and Pan Guangdan 潘光旦 (1899–1967), eagerly translated Freud and introduced Freudian ideas to Chinese readers around the same time.[22] But none of them employed analysis in the therapeutic context.[23] Dai's clinical practice, therefore, exceeds a receptionist history of psychoanalysis that rests on the register of discourses alone.

Dai's rendering of the unconscious mind as a universal referent recognized the significance of cultural forces in shaping psychological development. It was at PUMC, to take one example, that he met a 21-year-old obsessive-compulsive patient, Chen, whose story came to epitomize Dai's thinking on culture and personality disorders.[24] Departing from Freudian orthodoxy, Dai asked questions more proactively in sessions – a method he learned from Sullivan's interpersonal approach. Dai saw Chen for over 15 months, concluding that 'personality problems are essentially problems of social adjustment' (Dai, 1941, pp. 694, 688). The turning point in Chen's treatment occurred when Dai queried him about the first image that came to mind every time he decided to pause and repeat his behaviors. Chen revealed that it was his father's face. Dai merged this knowledge of the authority accorded to the paternal figure in Chinese families (filiality and

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20. On the history of the neuropsychiatry department at PUMC, see Shapiro (1995), Baum (2018).

21. On the literary appropriation of psychoanalytic tropes in May Fourth literature, see Zhang (1992), Larson (2009). To follow the convention of Chinese studies, the individuals in this and the following sentences are listed with their surname first, followed by their given name.

22. On Chinese translation of Freud, see, e.g., Gao (1930). On Zhang Jingsheng and Pan Guangdan, see, e.g., Chiang (2018).

23. With respect to China in the 1930s, Dai later declared that 'so far as I know, I was the only Chinese psychoanalyst engaged in clinical practice.' This quote is from Dai (1944, p. 327). On other practitioners of psychotherapy in the Republican period, see Blowers & Wang (2014). On the mental hygiene movement in Shanghai, see Wang (2019a).

24. See the repeated referencing of this case in Dai (1941, pp. 693–4); Dai (1957a, pp. 314–17).

obedience being additional characteristics) with free association, transference, and dream analysis to alleviate Chen's disorder. In deciphering another PUMC patient's neurotic symptoms produced by wartime anxiety, Dai superimposed homosexual fantasy and the feelings of fear or hatred toward the enemy on one another, and in so doing, he rendered the forming of same-sex relations as a displaced effort on the part of the patient to adjust to the conditions of Japanese occupation (Dai, 1944).

Dai also integrated linguistic clues to dream interpretations. When an illiterate 17-year-old girl complained about her fear of being sexually attacked by a dog, Dai was struck by the deeper meanings of her dream, which took the form of a beggar picking up a coal from the street. The girl revealed that the beggar made her think of 'the old man in the moon' (*yuelao* 月老), a Chinese god responsible for matchmaking. In northeast China, coal is pronounced *mei*, which could mean either the fuel for cooking or matchmaking. This convinced Dai that what the girl unconsciously desired was getting married. Rather than tracing the girl's fantasy to an early disturbance in psychosexual development, Dai's approach made room for psychic conflicts to form beyond the early years. His work on dreams differed from the interpretive mode of Freud's, especially with respect to the ample leverage for self-knowledge and explanation that Dai granted his patients (Dai, 1979). In Beijing, Dai supervised psychotherapy and trained an entire generation of medical staff in these psychoanalytic techniques that accounted for, rather than neglected, Chinese cultural factors (Dai, 1939, 1984).[25] One reputable colleague likely trained by Dai was Ting Tsan 丁瓚 (1910–68), whose interest in Freud and psychoanalysis coalesced around this time at PUMC (Blowers and Wang, 2014, pp. 147, 150) (see Figure 4). Ting became a prominent advocate of medical psychology in China during the Maoist era (1949–76) (Wang, 2019b, pp. 447–50).

Dai's transcultural reasoning is perhaps best illustrated in his interpretation of *ren* 仁, the linchpin of Confucian philosophy. Although this was already implicit in his engagement with the Chinese classics as a student, the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute as a teacher, and Sullivan's interpersonal theory as a disciple, Dai adhered to an epistemic synergy between Confucianism and psychoanalytic thinking until the end of his career. The word *ren* has been translated into English in many ways: benevolence, goodness, humanity, perfect virtue, true manhood, and human-heartedness. Dai considered none of these satisfactory. Instead, he explained, 'It seems best to follow closely the etymology of the character. *Ren* consists of two radicals: the one on the left means "man," and the one on the right "two." Thus, *ren* means two human beings in relation with each other … [and how they would] love each other. It was probably in this sense that both Confucius and Mencius taught that *ren* meant being human and that it also meant loving people' (Dai, 1981, p. 10). With this relational reading of *ren*,

25. On Dai's training of others, see the manuscript written by a Chinese medical student at PUMC, *Cong yanjiu jingshenbing dao jingsheng weisheng* (n.d.).

Figure 4. **Bingham Dai (third from the right in the second row) and Ting Tsan (third from the right in the first row) at Peking Union Medical College (1939). Courtesy of the Bingham Dai Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Appalachian State University.**

Dai strived to help his patients to reach a psychological state. It was a state where emotional health and the capacity to love found their fullest expression – the ultimate goal of therapy. To get there, the patient would have to confront hidden unconscious conflicts, including 'ailments resulting from undissolved infantile attachments, unresolved hatred, uncontrolled greed, envy, competitiveness and, above all, the inability to love or to give' (Dai, 1957b, p. 35).

Dai's syncretism exposed the shared values, alongside frictions and gaps, between systems of knowledge across a cultural divide. It carved out new conceptual territories for interpreting mental life through a person's negotiation with socio-environmental and developmental factors. Though this had also been the focus of anthropologically minded and neo-Freudian analysts, Dai turned the ethnographic gaze on its head. Non-western variation no longer served the purpose of rethinking the premise of the modern western subject; rather, the borders of culture and selfhood became the focus of contested knowledge at the neuropsychiatric ward of PUMC. His transcultural reasoning did not merely bring together western psychotherapy and Chinese conceptions of humanity. In so doing, it transformed their very foundations, including the meaning of Chinese culture and the social labor it performed. In Dai's consulting room, it was never a simple matter of applying dream analysis to Chinese patients. He co-utilized Chinese-specific cultural knowledge and psychodynamic techniques in order to bring about full human potential – as well as the promise of the talking

cure – which otherwise remained immediately inaccessible to the patient's conscious state.[26]

As is the case with many analysts, Dai's clinical approach changed over time. While Dai maintained a keenness for self-knowledge, he refined an exceedingly matured notion of the *primary self* toward the later stages of his career. This idea of the primary self is, again, evidence of the impact of neo-Freudian theorists on his thinking, especially Karen Horney's notion of the 'real self.' In light of the way his own direct experience often guided his theory building and psychotherapy, a comprehensive account of Dai's work also suggests that Carl Rogers (1907–87) supplied an integral role model. The concepts of *becoming* and *client-centered* developed by Rogers became core tenets of Dai's therapeutic practice (see, e.g., Dai, 1963, 1979).[27] Interestingly, Daoism served as a fulcrum: '[Laozi's] philosophy of non-action (*wu wei* 無為) to utilize the patient's own potentials for growth without interference has exerted a great deal of influence on some well-known psychotherapists […] including Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. It has certainly affected my own approach to psychotherapy to a large extent' (Dai, 1981, p. 14). Dai's analysis gave the self-concept an ontological stability not predetermined by particular spatial or temporal coordinates, but rendered its psychology as better understood and its potential as maximally reached through the execution of Asian philosophical doctrines in the therapeutic context.[28]

Transcultural Psychiatry in the Asia Pacific

A distinctive consequence of the novel style of reasoning which emerges in Dai's work can be seen in the formation of a new field of medicine called transcultural psychiatry. From the 1940s to the 1960s, Dai singled out the conflict between individual personality organization and the immediate social environment as a major cause of psychological abnormalities.[29] His clinical data, drawn from thousands of PUMC patient cases and beyond, persuaded a growing number of non-western psychiatrists interested in Chinese culture to engage with anthropological methods (especially those of the Culture and

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26. In 1952, Dai wrote about a general pattern he observed from treating patients with personality issues: 'What has prevented the patient from realizing his preferred self-picture seems to consist of impulses that are accompanied by different degrees of personal awareness; some of these impulses are readily accessible to consciousness while others are not accessible. These conflicting impulses seem to function at the same time in situations emotionally significant to the individual.' See Dai (1952, p. 45).

27. On the self-reflective tendency of Rogers's theory, see Dolliver (1995a, 1995b).

28. On Dai's implementation of Asian philosophical doctrines in psychotherapy, see, e.g., Dai (1966, 1969).

29. See Dai (1941, 1952).

Personality school).[30] A new cohort of practitioners, including Rin Hsien 林憲 (1925–2016) and Lin Tsung-yi 林宗義 (1920–2010) in Taiwan, Gwee Ah Leng 魏雅聆 (1920–2006) in Singapore, and Pow-Meng Yap 葉保文 (1921–71) in Hong Kong, began to argue for the importance of cultural sensitivity and competency. The terms on which the connection between these psychiatrists and Dai rests are neither purely personal nor citational. Rather, their relationship is akin to what philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009[1953]) has called 'family resemblance.'[31]

The social norms and organization of Chinese culture provided a new basis for discerning the psychogenic pathways of certain disorders previously glossed over by western psychiatrists. It was in this context that these Asian experts coined the concept of *culture-bound syndrome*, which was formally catalogued in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) in the 1990s (Yap, 1965; Berstein & Gaw, 1990). Situating Dai's contribution in relation to the work of these psychiatrists highlights some of the foremost historical features of transcultural psychiatry: how it arose out of – but also distinguished itself from – the conceptual architecture of colonial psychiatry; the way it challenged certain generic assumptions of psychoanalysis; its capacity to reshape the professional status and agency of Asian psychiatrists; why it enabled new understandings of non-western cultures; and the ways in which it mediated the global circulation of knowledge between certain locations in the Asia Pacific (typically dubbed as the 'margin' of biomedicine) and the alleged 'core' regions of mental health science.

Thus far, Dai's life and work – including both the details of his own personal transcultural trajectory and his concern to interpret psychopathology through its social, cultural, and local contexts – have functioned as a backbone for rehistoricizing mental health science. There is one more way by which biography enriches our knowledge: it constitutes a nodal point in the interplay between the disciplines of history and psychoanalysis. By this I do not mean merely that experts like Dai used patient life narratives to arrive at a scientific understanding of an underlying illness (even though they did so to varying extent). When the postwar generation of Asian cultural psychiatrists came to envision their new discipline, they also assumed that the validity of their style of reasoning and explanation could bolster the 'scientific' status of history. This is especially evident in Pow-Meng Yap's assessment of Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–64), the leader of the mid-nineteenth-century Taiping Rebellion in China. Why did Yap, a mental

30. For evidence of Dai's impact on other psychiatrists in the 1950s, see, e.g., Yap (1951, p. 325), Lifton (1955). On the Culture and Personality School, see, among others, Meyerowitz (2010), Mandler (2013).

31. On the contribution of these Asian psychiatrists to the vision of a 'world psyche' promoted by the World Health Organization, especially in relation to its work on the epidemiology and classification of mental disorders, see Wu (2021).

health specialist, delve into the political career of a historical figure from the distant past? The decade in which Yap investigated the case of Hong was the 1950s, an early stage of Yap's lifelong effort to delineate a coherent framework of comparative psychiatry.[32] It is imperative to ask, paraphrasing Warwick Anderson, Deborah Jenson, and Richard Keller, what did transcultural scientists like Dai and Yap need non-western cases to do? (2011a, p. 6).[33]

Rethinking Pow-Meng Yap

Born in Malacca, Malaysia and trained in psychiatry in Britain, Yap is widely held as a pioneer in the field of transcultural psychiatry. Much of his interest in this area of medicine can be traced to his biographical experience. In the late 1940s, Yap began working in Hong Kong. A pioneer of psychiatric rehabilitation and community care, he transformed Hong Kong's mental health service from custodial asylum to modern psychiatric care. In 1961, Yap took up the position of the first superintendent at Castle Peak Hospital, the first modern mental hospital in Hong Kong, and founded the Hong Kong Mental Health Association. From 1963, he served on the Expert Advisory Panel on Mental Health in the World Health Organization, advising on topics such as schizophrenia, suicide, and psychosomatic medicine.[34] Historian Ivan Crozier (2018) has argued that Yap's 'English training and his continual engagement with western psychiatric and philosophical frameworks is the best way to conceive of his contributions to this field' and that Yap's theory 'came with the promise of the expansion of mental health services from the West into non-Western settings' (pp. 363, 369). Crozier's interpretation espouses the very notion of 'psychiatric imperialism' (a concept borrowed from Margaret Mead) criticized by Yap himself (Yap, 1951, p. 313). Giving Yap insufficient credit for acknowledging the local conditions of Hong Kong health care and for overcoming the limitations of western medicine, Crozier's claim appears Eurocentric, overly rigid, and untenable in the way it disavows a more dynamic theoretical underpinning of transcultural psychiatry. According to this line of reasoning, the non-West can only be a passive recipient of knowledge formalized in the West rather than, as I have been suggesting, the place where the terms of new expertise are generated and bargained.

If there is one best way to conceive of Yap's contribution (and in my opinion, that is a big if), it must recognize the importance he placed on *situated* cultural knowledge as fundamentally altering what psychiatric science can do and know. Without this epistemological reorientation, the unabated *exclusive* recourse to

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32. Yap's work in this area culminated in his *Comparative Psychiatry* (1974).

33. Equally important is the question of what non-western exemplars dis-enabled the experts, revealing their underlying assumptions and denial.

34. On the career of Yap, see *Introducing the Life and Works of Professor P.M. Yap* (1999) (a special issue of *Hong Kong Journal of Mental Health*), Chiu (2012).

'western psychiatric and philosophical frameworks' severely undermines the intellectual achievement of Asian cultural psychiatrists. Yap not only spoke of the arbitrariness of social and clinical normality, but he cast western society, where he received training, as constituting only one part of a larger scale of cultural positioning. In a foundational essay titled 'Mental Diseases Peculiar to Certain Culture: A Survey of Comparative Psychiatry,' Yap cautioned,

> The forms of behavior of Euro-American cultures may be conveniently used for comparison with behavior elsewhere in order to enlarge our understanding of them all, but *they are neither necessarily the commonest nor the most healthy*, and they do not possess the finality that might come, for instance from basically biological norms. (Yap, 1951, pp. 326–7, emphasis added)

As one psychiatrist later remarked, Yap's 'was a very special voice talking in the 1950s about issues that very few people had discussed up to that time […] a voice of foresight' (Leff, 1999, 112).

In establishing cross-border thinking as a new empirical baseline of knowledge production, Yap's methodology transcended not only geographic but also disciplinary boundaries. Before Yap came to be embroiled in debates on culture-bound syndromes such as koro (genital retraction), Yap saw value in revisiting the story of one of the most legendary figures in Qing history: Hong Xiuquan.[35] Yap published his findings in *The Far Eastern Quarterly* in 1954. *The Far Eastern Quarterly* is the precursor to the *Journal of Asian Studies*, the flagship journal of one of the largest area studies organizations in existence, the Association for Asian Studies. In my Chinese history classes, I teach about Hong and his Kingdom of Heavenly Peace from a number of angles: midcentury rebellions, Manchu–Han ethnic relations, religious uprisings, post-Opium War social dislocation, and the pretext for Qing restoration and Self-Strengthening.[36] I tell my students that Hong had a vision – or a series of visions, to be precise – but whether Hong was mentally ill rarely come up in our discussion. Thus, the way Yap analyzed Hong's character development provides a refreshing perspective. Since Hong was the leader of the civil war that most likely toppled the Qing state in the nineteenth century, this medical insight carries special weight.

Psychiatry as a Handmaid to History

What is notable about Yap's interest in deducing a clinical portraiture of Hong is the insistence on using historical knowledge to refine the tenets of psychiatric science. It is true that in the essay Yap sometimes seems to eschew cultural relativism. For instance, he mentions in passing that 'There is, it might be added,

35. On the koro debate, see Chiang (2015).

36. On Hong and the Taiping Rebellion, see, among others, Spence (1996), Reilly (2011), Platt (2012), Meyer-Fong (2013).

no reason to suppose that such psychic processes in the Chinese insane differ essentially from those studied in the West' (Yap, 1954, p. 298). Yet this statement is more likely an assertion about the universal presence of insanity, rather than prescribing an uncontested template for the conception of insanity. A more prevailing theme in Yap's study is an alertness to the accuracy and reliability of historical data and the importance of cultural variation. Yap acknowledged the limits of the available sources on Hong, but he chose to rely on the ones he considered most authoritative – a move familiar to both academic historians and psychoanalytic biographers since Freud (Yap, 1954, p. 289). Outside China, Yap referenced examples from South America, Native America, and South Africa to destabilize a unitary understanding of the impact of Christianity in non-western cultures (Yap, 1954, p. 301). Inside China, he underscored a common belief in salvation among various religious traditions – Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism – to make sense of Hong's conversion experience (Yap, 1954, p. 300).

The most significant element of Yap's study, arguably, does not revolve around the accuracy with which he described Hong's mental condition. Yap considered Hong insane, in the sense of 'social incapacity,' and concluded that Hong's alleged vision of himself as the brother of Jesus Christ was nothing more than 'an example of the relatively commonplace phenomenon known as religious conversion' (Yap, 1954, p. 296). The scientific validity of Yap's interpretation does not sustain much clinical significance, given that Hong had long died, and there was no chance for Yap to speak to or treat him in person directly. The question remains: Why did Yap look to historical biography? This retrospective glance, with an implicit understanding of its promise and limitations, mimics other psychoanalytical studies of historical figures, such as Freud's investigation of Leonardo da Vinci (Freud, 1910).

Yap's own conclusion suggests that, ultimately, his study was intended to buttress a greater appreciation of historical sources and *their* validity. Because his words are revealing of the issues at hand, I quote them in full:

> The life and career of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan provides one of the clearest examples in history of the process by which vast social, economic and political forces impinge on the mind of an unusually perceptive and possibly unstable person, and having worked in him a transformation of mind and character, are through him gathered together and given meaning, and then released as *an indomitable psychic drive* to bring about social change. It is only in this light that Hung's place in history can be understood. Chinese authors have as a rule overlooked his mental illness, while many foreign authors have regarded him as a madman, although others also speak of him as a genius. The principle of cultural relativity applies to insanity as to other aspects of human behaviour. In the case of Hung an evaluation of his conduct and thinking is a rather delicate task not only because of *his own special cultural background*, but also because he lived in a period when the whole of Chinese culture was in violent transformation. But such an evaluation is really not important. The manner in which he arrived at his renovating ideas might have been grossly abnormal judged by ordinary standards, but it should be remembered that while his religion ended in rejection, and his revolution in failure, yet, in the light of history,

> many of the aims he cherished were also those sought by later Chinese leaders in the gradual process of the adaptation of China to a modern world. That is the measure of his genius, and the meaning of his madness. (Yap, 1954, pp. 303–4, emphasis added)

We can draw a number of conclusions on the basis of this account. First, it is evident that as much as Yap was interested in coming up with an accurate interpretation of Hong from a psychiatric viewpoint, his priority rested on arriving at a tenable *historical* understanding of Hong. Yap identified not only the way Hong matured as a son of religious transculturalism, but also the insufficiency of those existing psychiatric theories that lacked cultural rootedness. By recasting the relevance of in-depth analysis through a Chinese exemplar, Yap inherited the transcultural approach envisaged earlier by Dai. The point of retrospective analysis was to expose a caricature of Hong hidden from and not readily accessible to himself; cross-cultural analysis demonstrates the value of exceeding the western-centric frame of reference in psychiatry. While arguing that Hong's madness should not be ignored, Yap weighed the cultural relativity of the meaning of insanity. This comprises an overhaul in the conceptualization of clinical psychiatry, which tended to assume *a priori* the universality of western biomedical categories at the expense of regional and cultural variations (or pretend that these variations can be categorically subsumed under European norms). In fact, Yap went so far as to suggest that an assessment of Hong's behaviors and thinking was secondary to a thorough engagement with the historical context in which he lived.

Only with the benefit of hindsight can we now modify the relationship of biography to history and psychoanalysis. Hong's biography became embedded in the biography of Yap and transcultural psychiatry. Yap scrutinized Hong's life experience to elucidate the Taiping emperor's unconscious world. It is possible to locate Yap's study within a tradition that employs psychological methods for historical inquiry. In addition to Freud's famous studies (1930), some of these psychoanalytically oriented histories include Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1946[1933]), Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941), and Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). In this nexus of interrelation, psychiatric medicine does not necessarily represent the ultimate end in science but can very much function as a means to an end – to support the reliability and value of historical knowledge. While many Sinologists had questioned the veracity of existing documentations that describe Hong's visions, Yap insisted that 'There is no need to condemn reports of these incidents as spurious fabrications. Psychiatry can often be a handmaid to both history and sociology' (Yap, 1954, p. 303).

Conclusion

My research on Dai led me to explore the work of transcultural psychiatrists who came of age toward the end of Dai's career. However, rather than portraying this emergence of a new discipline as the antithesis of psychoanalysis, or as exemplifying the 'decline' of psychoanalysis, I propose to cast it as a

transformation of psychoanalysis at a time when the grounds of geopolitics were shifting rapidly. The transcultural style of reasoning operationalized by Dai and Yap surpasses the scientific framework of colonial psychiatry. This is especially so given that the regional focus of these experts – the Sinophone Pacific – bore only a partial relationship to European colonialism.[37] Neither Dai nor Yap was, as Crozier (2018) would have it, 'writing as someone who had privileged access to objective observations of mental phenomena because of [their] Chinese origin' (p. 370).[38] Their research called into question the construction of cultural Chineseness at the same time that it contested the universal legibility of western psychiatric theories. Both as an émigré scientist, a cultural broker, and a racialized minority in the global psychiatric profession, Dai and Yap held a *doubly marginalized* position. Giving their transcultural science due credit resuscitates them from the periphery of a new scholarly discourse. This attention to the agency of Asian mental health scientists revises the historiography of non-western psychoanalysis, which tends to center on its diffusion across the Atlantic and various (post)colonial contexts. Nested in the global reach of Chinese culture, the life and career of Dai and Yap underscore the gravity of regions normally neglected by histories of psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

Biography works in a number of ways to elucidate the significance of the Asia Pacific region to the transformation of psychoanalysis. An intellectual biography of Dai offers entry points to thinking about how foreign systems of thought enter, interact with, and accrue practical meaning in non-western cultures. It also introduces us to the way ideas about cross-cultural encounter assume scientific and clinical salience and even disciplinary debates and consolidation, such as in the development of transcultural psychiatry. Furthermore, the architects of this new discipline relied on biographies – or 'cases' – as the basis of their scientific reasoning. In Yap's study of Hong Xiuquan, such biographies not only worked as an evidentiary fulcrum for psychiatric explanation, but they also supported the validity of historical interpretation. This anticipated the approaches now more familiarly labeled as 'psychohistory.'

The case of Hong became embedded in the case that Yap made for transcultural and comparative psychiatry. John Forrester has proposed *reasoning in cases* as an addition to the list of six styles of scientific reasoning delineated by Crombie and Hacking: postulation and deduction, experimentation, modeling by analogy, taxonomy, statistical reasoning, and historical derivation of genetic development (Crombie, 1994; Hacking, 2002, 2009; Forrester, 2017). To take the intellectual labor of Asian experts like Dai and Yap seriously, and on their own terms, we can add an eighth: transcultural reasoning. If psychoanalysis has been absent in

37. On the notion of the Sinophone Pacific, see Shih (2007), Chiang (2021).

38. In fact, the background of someone like Yap bore only a very loose connection to continental China: he was born in Malaysia, trained in the UK, and established his career in the British colony of Hong Kong.

Chinese historiography, and if China has been missing from the biography of psychoanalysis, the hidden story of Dai, Yap, and their transcultural science awaits to be fully uncovered from our collective unconscious.

The conceptual innovation of Dai's and Yap's psychoanalytic science reflects the cultural crossings of their life journey. In this sense, their careers present the Asia Pacific not just as an end point or a locus for the expansion of European or American psychoanalysis across the globe, but as sites of encounter and renegotiation. East Asia becomes a region through which what is grounded exceeds what *became* of psychoanalysis; its cultural diversity precipitates the materials through which it is now still being made and remade. Like Iran, China can function as an engine of new imaginaries for psychoanalysis (Homayounpour, 2013). Instead of maintaining distinctions between 'pure' and 'impure' psychoanalysis, a more heuristically robust approach accounts for its transcultural existence and how different global locations give psychoanalysis not just a new future, but a new history.

Acknowledgements

This article has benefited enormously from peer review and feedback from Emily Baum, Geoffrey Blowers, Matt ffytche, Zhipeng Gao, Dagmar Herzog, Liz Lunbeck, and Wen-Ji Wang. I extend my gratitude to colleagues and participants who attended the 2019–20 working group on 'Medicine, Culture, and Mental Health in East Asia' (funded by the University of California Humanities Research Institute), the March 2021 Association for Asian Studies panel on 'Fathoming and Fixing Minds,' and the April 2021 Columbia Modern China Seminar for their comments and suggestions. I am especially thankful to Greta E. Browning for assistance with the Dai papers at Belk Library of Appalachian State University and Meiling Dai for corresponding about her father's life and work. Research for this project was supported by the 2018 Yu Ying-shih Award in Humanities Research from the Tang Prize Foundation, a New Research Initiative grant from the University of California, Davis, and a Research Grant (RG001-A-19) from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange.

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues that Asian psychoanalysts developed a new style of science, what I call *transcultural reasoning*, in the twentieth century. This conceptual innovation drew on the power of cultural narratives to elucidate the unconscious mind across different historical and geographical contexts. Focusing on the life and work of two experts in particular, Bingham Dai (1899–1996) and Pow-Meng Yap (1921–71), this article reconsiders the role of biography in the history of psychoanalysis and elucidates the importance of the Asia Pacific region to the transformation of mental health science in the twentieth century.

Keywords: Bingham Dai, biography, Pow-Meng Yap, psychoanalysis, transcultural psychiatry