

[Special Topic: *Family Counseling: Asian Perspectives*]

Editor's Introduction

S. Alvin Leung

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In June 2001, the Hong Kong Professional Counselling Association, along with the Hong Kong Baptist University and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, jointly organized an international conference on the theme of “Innovative Counseling for Families.” The conference featured a number of keynote speakers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States, and they presented scholarly papers related to current theories and techniques of family counseling, as well as the development of family counseling in Chinese communities in different regions.

In this issue of the *Asian Journal of Counselling*, we have put together some of the keynote presentations from this conference into a special topic entitled “Family Counseling: Asian Perspectives.” Each of the authors have further polished their ideas and revised their presentations into a scholarly article that was submitted to the *Journal*. Each of these submissions was peer-reviewed, and the respective authors were then asked to revise their articles again in response to comments from anonymous reviewers. The outcome is a collection of four very fine articles related to theories, processes, practice and current status of working with families in different Chinese and Asian communities.

Cultural understanding is a necessary component in any form of family intervention. Gushue and Sciarra (1995) suggested that family counseling and multicultural counseling shared a similar perspective that individual behavior could only be understood through knowing the larger contexts that are part of the individual's life structure, including but not limited to different family, interpersonal, social, and cultural systems and subsystems. In cultures in which collectivism is a dominant orientation (e.g., Duan & Wang, 2000), factors such as social and family norms, interpersonal harmony, and sense of loyalty to one's in-groups (including family) often exert a powerful influence on individual choices and behavior. Indeed, family counseling and therapy offer an exciting perspective for counselors and mental health practitioners in the Asian region as they work with individuals and families. However, it is important to note that family counseling and therapy, similar to other traditional approaches in counseling and psychotherapy, were developed in the Western world, and might not be appropriate for clients and settings in other cultures (Ho, 1987). In using family counseling approaches, it is important for counselors to have a good understanding of the cultural values and norms that shape family relationships and interactions. Otherwise, in the words of Gushue and Sciarra (1995), "the counselor runs the risk of viewing as pathology anything that differs from his or her own experience or beliefs about families" (p. 588).

The authors of these articles are scientists-practitioners with extensive experience in training, service, and research in counseling, including family counseling. They were asked to write their articles with three major objectives in mind. First, these articles have to synthesize theory and practice. Evidently, all four articles have examined theoretical constructs in family interventions in light of actual practice, and in two of the articles, case scenarios were used to illustrate how concepts and approaches were used in working with individuals and families. Second, the authors were asked to write their articles based on the perspectives of the Asian ethnic and cultural groups they have worked with. As a result, these articles covered at least three Asian cultural

groups, which were Chinese in Beijing, Chinese in Taiwan, and Asian Americans in the United States. Third, the authors were asked to integrate current research findings related to the themes they addressed into these articles. By and large, these articles have incorporate relevant findings from research studies as family counseling concepts and interventions were discussed.

It is my wish that this special topic will stimulate more research and practice in family counseling and therapy from a cross-cultural perspective, in Asia and in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, I would like to thank all the authors of the four articles for making such a scholarly contribution to the literature.

References

- Duan, C., & Wang, L. (2000). Counseling in the Chinese cultural context: Accommodating both individualistic and collectivistic values. *Asian Journal of Counselling, 7*(1), 1–21.
- Gushue, G. V., & Sciarra, D. T. (1995). Culture and families: A multidimensional approach. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 586–606). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ho, M. K. (1987). *Family therapy with ethnic minorities*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.