

Foreword



The reader of this book will soon recognize it as a major contribution to the ongoing consideration of many significant issues in the field of child psychotherapy. Issues such as how we work both to support the individual development of the child and recognize the significance of adapting to the field conditions such as cultural norms and values. The authors of the various chapters provide a depth of scholarship as well as sensitive and thoughtful clinical work with children that reflect these considerations as they are emerging in clinical practice in Asian societies. For the past decade I have had the privilege of joining with many of these authors as a teacher from the West. I have instructed hundreds of clinicians along the Pacific Rim from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. As a Western teacher I became a student, learning from my Asian colleagues about what was valuable within my perspective and what was not as they thought about the implications of my teaching to their work. We taught one another by sharing our experiences and our questions. Through dialogue we came to experience our contact as “the appreciation of differences and the recognition of similarities.”

This text will be welcomed by professors, clinicians, and parents of all cultures East and West. I have been enriched by reading about the challenges and developments of child psychotherapy within Asia over these past twenty five years. I am honored to participate with the editors and authors who have deepened my understanding of the fundamental cultural

influences throughout Asian societies and the great diversity that is there. My reading has caused me to reflect upon the assumptions and “unthought knowns” that have shaped my own clinical work. I am certain that clinicians in both the East and the West will find themselves reading and reflecting on what is the purpose of our clinical endeavors as well as how our cultural assumptions inform how we carry out our clinical practice.

In addition to an exploration of the contextual background of our clinical work, each author has written from her theoretical perspective a narrative and discussion of therapy with a child. These case narratives with theoretical material will greatly enhance the development of awareness of the variety of approaches to clinical work with children. It is wonderful to read that so many clinicians from various Asian societies recognize the significance of play in the cognitive and emotional development of children. In our contemporary digitalized world which has been guided too often by historical traditions that stress self-improvement through effort and work, we have needed to recover the necessity of unstructured play in the socialization, creativity, and intellectual rigor necessary for healthful growth and development of children. Each of the clinicians writes about the need for play as a therapeutic language and a way that the therapist engages with each child. The discussion that they bring to the importance of play in therapy is filled with warmth and fun, as well as clinical assessment.

I commend the editors and authors of this text for their contributions not only to the teaching of West to East, but equally significant, is the teaching of East to West. This collection brings insightful support to our conversations. And those who will benefit the most from our dialogue together are our children.

Felicia Carroll, MEd and MA,
Licensed Marriage, Family Therapist,
Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor,
Founder and Advanced Trainer of the
West Coast Institute for Gestalt Therapy
with Children and Adolescents, California USA

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This is a book that should be read by most play therapists. Although the focus is on play therapy in Asian countries, this book has many insights that would be helpful for any play therapist. In today's globalization of human cultures, it is imperative that therapists are aware and sensitive to the different values and practices of varied ethnic groups. In the following pages there is a clear description of many of these differences (and similarities) not only within the Asian countries, but also between the East and West worlds.

The authors of each chapter are experienced professionals who are knowledgeable not only about the different models of play therapy that are used in their respective countries, but also about parental attitudes and child rearing practices that need to be considered in modifying therapeutic approaches. For example, in the East, the widespread emphasis on academic excellence from early childhood can contribute to a down valuing of play which can be considered to be just "fun" and frivolous. This can lead to a lack of faith in the value of play therapy and instead, a seeking of medical interventions and medications for their children's problems. Added to this is a sense of parental "shame" in having a troubled child and a need to "save face" where reputation and prestige are more important than a child's mental health. As well, in the East, there can be a reluctance to speak candidly about their problems, so the therapist may need to rely on being extra sensitive to nonverbal cues such as eye gaze, body posture, voice tone, etc.

The need to modify a treatment approach is frequently cited in this book and the reasons for it are also addressed. In the East, the influence of “collectivism” and a striving for “harmony” has had a profound influence on parental practices of teaching their children self control, emotional restraint, social inhibition and dependence on others. In contrast, western countries encourage individualism, self-determination, independence and expression of feelings. Asian children are brought up in an authoritarian atmosphere where they are expected to be polite, obedient and to wait for adult instruction. When they are confronted with a western style therapeutic approach (such as non-directive or client-centered play therapy), where they are expected to be self-directed, they can be overwhelmed with anxiety and stress. A modification is suggested by several authors, advocating the use of a more structured, directive approach in the beginning sessions.

Another modification when working with Asian children is in regards to the selection of toys—for instance, if pigs and dogs are regarded as “unclean,” it might feel offensive to have such toys in the play room or to avoid the presence of guns or knives, to combat the parent’s fears that their child might become more aggressive. These are examples that indicate the strong need to include parents in any play therapy approach and the need for parental psychoeducation.

As well as differences between East and West worlds, there are problems common to both. For example, the increasing trend of both parents working and leaving their child from an early age to institutionalized daycares or extended relatives is found in both worlds. This becomes particularly worrisome when parent/child separations are frequent and long-lasting such as the “left behind children” in China.

In addition to including many examples for therapists to consider regarding cultural beliefs and child rearing practices, each author has also included the history and present status of play therapy in their respective countries as well as related research. Authors also voice the need for more controlled studies and state that stricter credentialing of play therapists and monitoring of their practices is needed.

This book as a whole, gives a clear picture of the part play therapy is playing in Asia today and the hopes and dreams for its future.

Evangeline Munns, PhD, CPsych, RPT/S