

GLADYS FOXE

“May You Live in Interesting Times!” From Crossculture, and Counterculture, and Countertransference while working with a Chinese Journalist

Special challenges interrupt analytic engagement when personal understandings, cultural pressures, and formative historical events are all contending providing a unique window into the “dangers and desires” inherent in working together. And such collisions and collusions are magnified when the patient’s personal narrative, interwoven with family history and political events, converge with the analyst’s own personal and familial structure.

This was the case with H., an accomplished Chinese journalist and gifted musician (now living and working in the United States,) whose eventful life before, during, and after China’s Cultural Revolution led to his seeking treatment. Chou’s crusades for justice for marginal groups in China (especially miners, farm workers, and migrant workers) coexisted with schizoid adaptations that grew out of multi-layered traumas of abandonment, first by his mother, then by a series of relatives, and finally, if not always, by the Chinese state. These events left him avoidant of social contacts and personal relationships, with only his writing as a vehicle of emotional expression and empowerment.

Chou’s integration of severe dysfunction with a consummately productive life posed a challenging dilemma, which well illustrates the manner in which psychodynamics are shaped by historical events, and intergenerational family dramas are played out in the shadow of history. (In treatment, the transference/countertransference dynamic was shaped by the degree to which both analyst and analysand, despite vastly differing backgrounds, sharing similarities, seeking individual expression through ideas and idealizations.) This presentation addresses the special challenges of analytic engagement when personal understandings, and cultural pressures are encouraged in the room, and how crossculture, counterculture and countertransference are continually negotiated over the course of treatment.

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