

New Age with Chinese Characteristics? Translating Inner Child Emotion Pedagogies in Contemporary China

Sonya E. Pritzker

Abstract This article examines the translation of inner child emotion pedagogies in contemporary China. With a focus on several interactions taking place within evening salons, the article observes the pedagogical strategies and metalinguistic practices that translate as well as transform inner child pedagogies in novel ways. I emphasize the ways in which these encounters play upon the boundaries between “inner” and “outer” selves in the teaching of a distinct discursive consciousness regarding the role of language and embodied expression in the healing of the inner self. I argue that this creates both a distillation as well as expansion of western psychotherapeutic ideologies of language, emotion, and the self. I further highlight the ways in which the interactions index a broadly distributed process of concurrent events and sociohistorical circumstances that bring adapted versions of psychotherapeutic and New Age spiritual discourse into China. This article argues that the translation of inner child emotion pedagogies in China unfolds through a process of *living translation*, in which specific encounters serve as instances in which the meaning and implications of semiotic and linguistic registers are continuously remade in an ongoing stream of embodied interactions that are mediated by various ideologies of language, emotion, and personhood.

本文探讨了在当代中国内在小孩情感教学法的翻译。通过“内在小孩疗愈晚间沙龙”的几次互动，本文重点观察教学策略和元语言实践——即对内在小孩疗愈法的创新翻译和转化。在这种独特的话语意识教学中，笔者强调，冲突在“内在”和“外在”自我界限间作用的这种方式，在治愈内在自我过程中，对语言和形象化表达的作用。笔者认为，这在语言、情感和自我方面同时凝练而拓展了的西方心理治疗体系。笔者进一步强调，互动指向广泛分布的同期事件和社会历史状况的这种方式，把本土化的心理治疗学和新世代心灵的语言带入了中国。本文认为，在中国的内在小孩情感疗愈是通过当下翻译来展开的，在此翻译过程中，特定冲突被作为微观民族志的实例。这些例子中，符号学和语言学记录的含义持续地通过语言、情感和人格知识体系在具象化的互动中获得。

[China, emotions, self-cultivation, translation, New Age]

We sit in a circle, about 20 of us, on straw pillows in a dimly but comfortably lit room in a high-rise complex in the Northeast of Beijing, China. It is evening, a Thursday—the day when each week the small new age book publisher and mind-body-spirit center offers a “salon” on such topics as “The Inner Child” (*neizai xiaobai*), or “Family Constellation Therapy” (*jiating xitong pailie*), two of the most popular self-help workshop formats in contemporary Beijing. The salons are meant to provide ancillary support to attendees of the larger events offered by the center, including pricy multiple-day workshops taught by international experts. Participation at the salons is not limited to those who have attended the larger events, however. These weeknight, donation-based events are also encouraged as support for regular clients of the workshop facilitator, Teacher Dou, who offers

psycho-spiritual counseling at the center. Likewise, curious individuals are drawn in by the various announcements on WeChat, a phone app that has been dubbed “the Chinese Facebook,” where messages about upcoming workshops are shared alongside articles on transforming emotions or understanding oneself.

The salons attract a range of professional, mostly white-collar individuals. As in most psychospiritual or what could loosely be called “New Age” settings, attendees are mostly women, though tonight there are three men besides the instructor. Immediately upon entering the space, it is clear that something unusual is happening. People affiliated with the center wear loose Indian-style robes and earth-toned, comfortable clothes that evoke the global yoga and spirituality movement. Long-term participants offer each other long, drawn-out hugs to say hello and goodbye, a custom that is not usually followed in daily Chinese life.

The salon, which tonight focuses on inner child work, begins with introductions. After Teacher Dou, a Chinese man in his late thirties, offers a little bit of his own background—he came to the work first as a participant and then slowly developed his own teaching and practice—we go around in the circle. Out of the 22 present at tonight’s event, most explain that they are there because of something related to their emotions. Several participants express the desire to “go deeper” into the underlying patterns that shape their emotions. A few others want to learn how to better manage their emotions, especially within the context of troubling professional or family relationships. Many participants reveal current challenges they are facing with their own emotional expression, or they describe particular triggering relationships they are working through, in rich detail. It is widely accepted that many are there to further their process of “psychospiritual development” (*xinling chengzhang*). Between introductions, the group claps. There is a great deal of laughter and other emotional expression during this time. Several of the participants’ introductory remarks lead to deeper questioning from Dou, who seizes certain opportunities to both arouse further self-expression from participants and engage in teaching about what it means to know oneself, to feel emotion, and to express one’s true self (*zhenwo*).

In this article, which is based on several months of ethnographic fieldwork attending such salons as well as the larger inner child workshops, reading related material, and conducting interviews with participants in Beijing, I examine several interactions that translate inner child work in group sessions. Viewing such workshops as an example of what Wilce and Fenigsen call “emotion pedagogies” (EPs), I see *inner child emotion pedagogy* as a set of “interventions into the ‘emotions’ that in crucial ways imitate [the] pedagogical paradigm of institutional education” (Wilce and Fenigsen, this issue). EPs, broadly speaking, are unique in the sense that they unfold in a very specific curricular context that is usually based in a commercialized small group structure specifically designed to teach emotional skills, including especially how to feel and how to appropriately express deep emotions (Wilce and Fenigsen, this issue). In this framework, all emotions are technically valued as valid experiences, though their expression is arguably constrained by varying expectations about what types of emotional demonstrations are appropriate. Differing from general forms of emotion socialization or “emotional training” (Kusserow 2004), EPs in the west often hinge

on the blurring of lines between the secular and the spiritual and derive in large part from the “massive subjective turn” (Taylor 1989) as well as the “subjective life spirituality” movement that has become increasingly popular in the United States and Europe (Heelas 1996; Heelas et al. 2005; Wilce 2011).

Inner child workshops in China can be said to function in much the same way. Indeed, salons geared towards the inner child in this Beijing center consist of adaptations of exercises developed by a European psychologist who leads longer inner child workshops, variably focused on “transforming emotions,” “transforming beliefs,” and “meeting true self,” when he is in town. In the larger workshops that focus on transforming emotions, participants are guided very intentionally in pedagogical exercises that demand an embodied exploration of childhood experiences, especially relationships with parents and other key family members, in a quest to uncover and express their inner worlds in healthy ways. Emotions, in this framework, are situated deep within the self—literally in the “inner” child—and require guided efforts at discovery that, though heavily mediated by embodied experience, also demand reflective verbal expression in order to be released. What I am calling inner child EPs thus fall very much within the realm of EPs as broadly understood by Wilce and Fenigsen in that they understand, and teach, the self “as a reflexive object to be cultivated and improved through voluntary effort under expert guidance” (this issue).

Asking how such complex practices are “translated” in China, as I do in this article, demands a theoretical orientation that attends to more than just the translation of specific terms or practical orientations. It requires attention to underlying ideologies of emotion, selfhood, and language shaping both inner child pedagogies and the deep personal experiences that Chinese participants bring to the encounters. It further requires an appreciation of broad sociocultural and historical trends that mediate and shape interactions in this complex field of practice. As a framework for my investigation, I therefore draw upon the notion of *living translation*, which is a methodological and theoretical framework that I originally developed to understand the translation of Chinese medicine into practice in the United States (see Pritzker 2011, 2012, 2014). In this framework, the meaning and implications of specific semiotic and linguistic registers are made and remade in an ongoing stream of embodied interactions that are themselves mediated by various ideologies of language, emotion, and personhood (see Pritzker 2014:10). In this sense, the living translation of inner child EPs in China points to a broadly distributed process of concurrent events and interactions that bring adapted versions of psychotherapeutic and New Age spiritual discourse into China (see below). As a methodological framework, however, living translation also demands a microethnographic engagement with specific interactions and events, alongside a nuanced appreciation of the deeply personal search for meaning that motivates individuals to participate in such encounters. Rather than focusing on the broad conceptual translation and reworking of an abstract “inner child theory” to fit “Chinese participants,” in this article I therefore emphasize the ways in which specific encounters function as sites for inner child EPs and their attendant ideologies to come alive in China vis-à-vis specific pragmatic and metalinguistic practices that simultaneously “distill” (see Carr 2011) and expand originals. I argue, moreover, that this distillation and expansion, or *blending* process, cultivates a unique

ideology of emotion that is neither “Eastern,” nor “Western,” but instead constitutes a semi-otic repertoire of emotion and experience that shifts from one moment to the next, bringing new layers of meaning to familiar terms and transforming both inner child pedagogies as well as the landscape of emotional experience in individual participants.

The following section examines the ideologies of language and emotion informing inner child EPs, broadly speaking, and situates Chinese inner child work in a sociohistorical frame, emphasizing especially how the personal meaning-making efforts of attendees at inner child workshops resonates with broad cultural themes. In the third section, I examine several instances taking place in inner child salons. These include a dramatic enactment of emotions, an interaction with a participant during introductions, and a pedagogical exercise in differentiating emotions from “reactions” (*fanying*), “thoughts” (*xiangfa*), or “beliefs” (*xinnian*). In my analyses, I attend to the dialogic, embodied nature of such interactions, which both distill and transform original or western forms of inner child EPs. Here, I focus specifically on the ways in which co-constructed pedagogical strategies convey a distinct form of discursive consciousness with regards to the place and meaning of emotion and emotional expression within and between selves in contemporary China. I also examine the sociopolitical repercussions of these pedagogical interactions, which often focus on the self to the exclusion of broad social forces. I conclude with a brief reflection on the findings and their theoretical implications for the broader field of anthropology and the emerging field of study surrounding the global circulation of emotion pedagogies.

Inward, Outward, and In-Between

Inner child work, broadly speaking, is a set of practices that has emerged over the last 50 years or so in the West. Based loosely in both Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, inner child therapy as developed by recovery-movement giant John Bradshaw and others hinges on the notion that suffering adults “are stuck at various earlier developmental stages when their necessary narcissistic needs were not lovingly met” (Ivy 1993:236; see also Bradshaw 1990). Recovery in inner child therapy therefore emphasizes the need for both emotionally charged “regression” as well as an active “reparenting” process:

Reclaiming the inner child requires that the subject regress to the various developmental stages of childhood and work through any incomplete business from those stages; at each stage the adult uses fantasy and memory to assist and reclaim the inner child of that moment. It is crucial, according to these therapies, to express grief for the needs that were not met when they should have been. (Ivy 1993:240)

A key piece of healing in inner child work thus requires that “the adult moves back and forth between locating herself as the infant (for example, in the crib) and as the wise and gentle adult who is now looking down at the infant with love and is ‘reparenting’ the child” (Ivy 1993:243). As such, inner child work derives from a certain set of psychotherapeutic ideologies that together formulate a model of personhood in which “inner experience” can be brought out vis-à-vis a set of semiotically mediated pedagogical and therapeutic encounters. In part, this framework echoes what Carr refers to as the *ideology of inner reference*, in

which a “quintessentially American” (2011:150) ideology of language as referential functions to teach participants that health consists of increased access to and ability to express the preexisting, inner self. In inner child work, however, there is also a notable emphasis on discovering, through “real-time” verbal and embodied expression, aspects of the emotional self that arise in the moment during any given regression exercise. In other words, there is an acknowledgment of the ways in which emotional self-discovery arises in collaborative, dialogic encounters with the facilitator and other group members, a process similar to that highlighted by Capps and Ochs (1995:176).

Although the self—or more appropriately, aspects of self—that are discovered in inner child encounters are in many ways imagined to have already existed prior to discovery, it is the self-narration process itself which is thought to support the development of a “centered” consciousness or “true self” that is not *identified with* particular emotions but instead can identify them as aspects of the inner child (or children, as it were, for multiple children of different ages with different emotions are often found within one individual). By calmly identifying, and naming, such emotions, one becomes able to “hold space” for all of them, a process that is envisaged as a kind of deep self-love. The notion of a detached observer who is able to articulate and care for the wounded inner child further invokes a *spiritual* ideology of meditation and detachment as necessary preconditions to health. As this detached self learns to verbalize the chaotic emotions of the inner world, inner child work continues to emphasize the ideology of inner reference, but we could say it does so “with a spiritual twist” that imagines such articulation to take place as an active engagement with and simultaneous detachment from present emotional experience while aligning with a more peaceful true self. In inner child work, the ego or “small self” is said to be led around unconsciously by circumstances and tradition, whereas the true self is a self that is aware of its emotional landscape to such an extent that the person has tools to disengage from raw expression and dip back into full feeling after developing her self-reflective capacities. Inner child work therefore understands itself as a distinct contemporary process taking place at the intersection of psychotherapeutic self-growth movements and adapted forms of Eastern spirituality. Indeed, the international teacher who leads the larger workshops related to the salons examined in this article self-identifies as both psychotherapist and spiritual practitioner, having studied clinical psychology, Sufism, and Yogic spirituality in equal measures.

The kinds of interactions this article examines are thus firmly located within an ideology of selfhood and emotion that derives from western psychotherapeutic self-help practice in combination with a New Age emphasis on spiritual growth (see Heelas et al. 2005). The distinct “westernness” of inner child work, one might assume, makes it particularly difficult to translate in China (see D’Andrea 2007 for a discussion of how similar self-work resonates poorly with Indian nationals). It could be argued, however, that inner child EPs in China also draw upon a long cultural history of self-cultivation practices. This includes especially classical practices encouraging the management of the heart–mind (Brindley 2010; Puett 2004) or emotional self-cultivation (especially the management of anger) in women in the Tang dynasty (Woo 2002, 2009 as cited in Kuan 2015:100). In stark contrast to

the emphasis on reflective *verbal expression* characterizing the ideology of inner reference, however, classical Chinese theories of emotion-based self-cultivation emphasized the need for *refinement* of emotion through the development of ritualized and patterned living (Puett 2004; Sundararajan 2015). In the *Xunzi*, a Confucian text compiled circa 285–c. 255 BCE, it states that “one should regulate emotion (*qing*) by studying the principles discovered by the sages and transmitted in the *Poetry, Documents, Rituals, and Music*” (Puett 2004:52). “Study” here refers to more than the logical absorption of textual material: it also points to the regulation of the body through proper eating, clothing, ritual, and sexual practice. The idea here is cultivation of the “upright person” (*zhengren*), often imagined as male, as opposed to the “petty person” (*xiaoren*), who was often envisioned to be female (Ling 2010). This distinction that is interestingly echoed in the division of the self in inner child literature into the “true self” (*zhenwo*) and “small self” (*xiaowo*) (Furth, personal communication, 2015). Rather than distinguishing and “processing” specific emotions, as in inner child work, however, the overarching goal is the cultivation of a smooth, harmonious existence. When it comes to self-cultivation in classical Chinese literature, “The metaphor . . . is the polishing of jade—to bring out the beauty and luster of a precious gem” (Sundararajan 2015:168). This polishing is considered to smooth out strong emotions and to lead to equanimity and harmonious relationships. It thus involves the cultivation of a distinct “emptiness” of the heart–mind such that feeling and desire can be properly directed and channeled into a harmonious experience that also incorporates others. Classical Chinese medical theory likewise elaborates on the necessity of cultivating equanimity vis-à-vis the emotions. Strong emotions, negative or positive, are understood to be the cause of illness as well as social disharmony (Larre and Rochat de la Vallée 1996).

The central definition of emotion or *qing* in this classic literature is one’s “emotional disposition” or “to the ways that one’s emotions will be pulled out in particular circumstances” (Puett 2004:45–46). This conceptualization of the emotional centers around the notion that there is a fundamental connection, vis-à-vis the *xin* or heart–mind, between “inner” experience and “outer” circumstance, including relationships with intimate others, especially parents and elder family members. Resonance, or *ganying*, “describes the architecture of the universe as a series of ‘endless chains of correspondences between different parts’ (Le Blanc 1995:73). To know these chains is to *feel* them, with the first character in the term, *gan*, referring to affect, and the second, *ying*, designating a reaction or response,” as I detail in Pritzker (2014:8). Inner and outer are thus intimately connected through a correspondent chain of feeling, centered in the heart–mind, and mediated by *qi*, which is “understood as the vital energetic source uniting both structural and functional realities of body, mind, and spirit” (Pritzker 2014:40; see also Sundararajan 2015). Indeed, Zhang writes that “Chinese do have the concept of ‘*nei*’ 内 (inside), yet *nei* exists meaningfully only when it is manifested to the outside. There is no meaningful inside that is without an outside correspondence in speech, action, or inaction” (2007:61). In many ways this understanding of emotion as “in-between,” a shifting array of self and other, invokes the fluidity of surfaces in Ahmed’s model of emotion, in which “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects” (2015[2004]:10). The fact remains,

however, that this understanding of concepts like “inner” or “emotions” as fundamentally resonant with “outer,” morally dictated relationships differs considerably from the ideology of the “inner world” of the self in most forms of western psychotherapy, including inner child work.

To understand the translation of inner child EPs in China, it is also important to note that in contemporary China, there has been a massive uptake of psychotherapeutic discourse in almost all areas of life. From the television psychotherapists who encourage self-expression as the key to happiness (see Huang 2014; Yang 2013) to the government-sponsored programs that provide counseling to unemployed workers (Yang 2014, 2015) to the self-help manuals supporting parents who want to assist the individual creative development of their children (Kuan 2015), scholars have repeatedly emphasized contemporary trends towards increased attention to the inner self in China (Evans 2012; Hansen et al. 2010; Kipnis 2012; Kleinman et al. 2011; Ong 2008; Rofel 2007; Yan 2009). This expression draws heavily upon linguistic resources, such as the proliferation of increasingly nuanced emotion terms in Chinese (Kleinman et al. 2011; Lee 2011) and therapeutic practices encouraging unprecedented levels of open communication in intimate relationships in China (Evans 2012; Lee 2011). It also involves a reworking of many classical philosophies of life within a psychotherapeutic framework of emotion (Zhang 2014).

Notably for our purposes, the increased attention to psychotherapy in China also involves the proliferation of psychologically oriented “trainings” (*peixun ban*) that many anthropologists have identified as a central component of the rising “psycho-boom” (*xinli re*) in China (Huang 2014; Kleinman et al. 2011; Zhang 2010). In such trainings, Huang explains, private for-profit companies offer short (two- to seven-day) courses that claim to transform individuals “without previous training in medicine, psychology, or education into . . . therapist[s]” (2014:190). Given the difficulty in starting up a viable therapeutic practice in China, the motivation for attending such courses is not necessarily professional. Instead, many individuals are drawn to such trainings because of their promise, as one popular company states, that “learning psychological counseling can help you master the methods of self-adjustment, by which you can enhance your quality of life, increase your working efficiency, educate your children more successfully and better handle your family relationships” (Huang 2014:195; see also Kleinman et al. 2011:29). In many of these trainings, the notion of self-cultivation, as classically understood, becomes both pedagogical and psychotherapeutic. The inner child salons examined here can thus be seen as part of the popular *peixun* movement, though the center they are associated with tends to deemphasize pure psychotherapeutic material, instead offering books and trainings more in alignment with New Age spirituality (popular books in the center, for example, include translations of Pema Chodron, Ken Wilber, and Eckhart Tolle as well as Chinese books from local and Taiwanese New Age gurus). Given that the expensive workshops held by international leaders at the center draw in upwards of 40–50 participants per weekend, many of whom have already spent hundreds of thousands of yuan (tens of thousands of US dollars) on similar pursuits, inner child workshops cannot be viewed apart from the multibillion dollar industry of the self in China (Huang 2014;

Zhang 2010), an industry that feeds on the perpetual search for greater health and happiness through individual self-cultivation (Bunkenborg 2014; Wielander 2015).

This unending “search for the self” in contemporary China is fueled, it is important to recognize, by a complex set of social circumstances that implicate the shifts in the structure of economic imperatives, marital relationships, extended kinship relations, education, and parent–child bonds that have altered the fundamental ground upon which the individual stands in relation to others (Fong 2007; Hansen 2015; Kuan 2015; Xiao 2014; Yan 2009). The rapid growth of psychological self-help and psychospiritual training can be seen as the effect of much more than simply an imagined “globalization” of such trends. Instead, Bell (2008) describes the moral “vacuum” that has been created by the decline of communism and the rapid unleashing of market forces. In this environment, Chinese individuals are more socially isolated and morally confused, and they are searching, sometimes desperately, for a new, more fulfilling model of selfhood, relationships, and especially family.

This is reflected in what participants in the inner child and other workshops have shared about the central role that such practices have in their lives, as was perhaps apparent in some of the brief introductory comments noted at the outset of this article. Participants’ comments on their desires to delve deeply into the underlying emotional patterns that structure their relationships and further their psychospiritual development together suggest that attendants are motivated by a sense that the knowledge and practices they learn in the workshops will make their lives better. Interviews with regular attendees reflected this deeply felt desire to find their “true selves.” One regular participant, for example, comments on previous generations in China, saying that 20 or 30 years ago, “No one paid attention to any of this stuff. The emphasis in their lives was elsewhere. But now people want to live better lives, to be happier. So people are confronting these types of issues.” With this statement, this participant links peoples’ desires for happiness to their motivation to attend more rigorously to their inner lives. Immediately following this, however, she also explains that her own and others’ reasons also involve the fact that, in contemporary Chinese society, “relationships are becoming more complex, and more confusing.” She uses her own experience of alienation from her now ex-husband as an example and explains that many of her classmates in these types of events are there for similar reasons. “It is why many of these types of things focus on intimate relationships and family relationships,” she explains. But there is also a sense that the many uncertainties of contemporary Chinese society, beyond the family, play a role in motivating individuals to more deeply understand their inner lives:

“Life in China is not easy . . . There is so much that is uncertain . . . so much unknown. On one hand, this can be exciting and fresh. If you have enough strength, you can face a lot of unknowns. But on the other hand, it can make people terrified.”

She goes on to explain that because nothing is guaranteed to stay the same for any length of time in contemporary Chinese society, it is difficult to rely on anything. The anxiety this causes motivates many, like herself, to seek certainty elsewhere, within themselves. The quest thus takes on a persistent quality, an endless search for self amidst constantly changing

relationships, especially marital and family relationships, as well as social structures. And while the process of going deeper into the self is often a struggle, it is one that, according to most participants, is well worth it. One regular workshop attendee states in an interview, for example, that the inner work she has the opportunity to do in the workshops is more valuable than clothing, material goods, or even clean air and food. So while previous generations had better air and cleaner food, she notes, “at the soul level (*xinling cengmian*), we actually are receiving so much more nourishment than previous generations. Our inner hearts (*neixin*) are a little more powerful.”

Yet another participant, who also teaches workshops at the center, emphasizes the desire to transform traditional methods of raising children that brings many people to the work: “they have a distinct awareness that they don’t want to bring up their children in a traditional way,” he says, “especially our traditional ways of using criticism, punishment, and threats to socialize kids. So they begin to study, asking whether we have better forms of socialization.” The search for new ways to be in relation to offspring, he continues, leads to a deeply personal and engaged self-project. “These new mothers, when they begin to pay attention to educating themselves on the development process, they simultaneously move towards a path of individual self-development.” (See also Kuan 2015.) The notion that emotions, especially feminine emotions, must be regulated for the sake of children is thus a common refrain in these settings. In many introductory comments, for example, women make statements such as “I didn’t know I was so emotional until I had a child.” These trends directly index the overarching concern with the emotions of mothers in contemporary China, where a tension exists between raising competitive children and nurturing the inner spirit of each individual child (Kuan 2015). Kuan (2015) thus highlights the extent to which this path of self-discovery is deeply tied to long-standing Chinese assumptions about women and their supposed inability to control dangerous emotions like anger, the primary role of the mother in raising children, and the additional burden that women carry by also working outside the home.

This section has provided a great deal of insight into the history of inner child EPs, the history and development of self-cultivation practices in China, and the personal meaning-making endeavors of regular Chinese inner child workshop participants. I want to emphasize that all of this deeply informs my central question regarding how inner child EPs are translated in specific encounters in China. In fact, one could say that the ongoing circulation of classical, western, psychotherapeutic, and spiritual ideologies described in this section, especially those that variably emphasize inner and outer distinctions and the role of language in self-transformation, serves as a *mediating force* for the interactions I examine below. Another way of putting this would be to say that the translation of inner child EPs as evidenced in the following data is indexical of a much broader ongoing process of living translation that involves “multiple parties in an ongoing stream of interaction” (Pritzker 2014:88). A simplistic dichotomization of “East” and “West” when it comes to the translation of inner child practices, which themselves are hybrids of Western psychotherapeutic and Eastern spiritual discourses, is therefore not appropriate for understanding translation in this field. Instead, my analysis follows scholars who have demonstrated that the adoption of psychology in China often involves a dialogic localization (*bentubua*) of psychological theory and practice

to make it more acceptable and sensible to Chinese populations (Zhang 2010). I borrow also from Lee, who, in writing a genealogy of sentiment in modern China, emphasizes the “complex process of hybridization whose inevitable clashes, compromises, convergences, and dispersals cannot be adequately dealt with through the anthropological mode of binary analysis” (2007:16). In living translation, however, I seek to go beyond (or rather, delve into) a broad genealogy of inner child EPs in China. Instead, I take direction from Carr, who writes that “While a genealogy . . . does the invaluable work of helping us to understand ‘broad discursive shifts’ . . . it does much less to elucidate the everyday semiotic processes involved in the establishment and sustenance of powerful iconic figures” and argues that we need to ask about the “everyday ways of speaking and interacting that sustain [certain] discourses” (2011:25–26). The next section thus presents detailed ethnographic data from specific interactions in several inner child salons led by Teacher Dou, whose work translating inner child EPs in China, we will see, involves unique strategies that transform original exercises in intentional ways.

Living Translation of Emotion Pedagogies

“We need to face our emotions.”

This interaction takes place several weeks prior to the evening introduced at the outset of this article, at another evening inner child salon. It is the beginning of the session, just after introductions. One participant is invited to the center of the circle for a dramatic enactment, a common pedagogical tool in many of these workshops. It involves calling participants up to act out multiple different aspects of a central participant’s experience. The focus of tonight’s enactment is asked by the facilitator to describe what her feelings might be if she were criticized by her boss. She answers clearly: she would feel depressed (*yumen*). A participant is then called up to enact her depressed feelings. Dou probes her further, and, placing her hand on her chest, explains that she would feel “knotted” in her throat (*sangzi jie*). Again, she is probed further. “Do you have any other feelings towards boss?” Dou asks. She thinks. Pauses. “Dissatisfied,” she says, and someone comes up to portray her dissatisfaction. Dou then leads her to experience the “feeling of dissatisfaction with herself,” after which he probes her again to reveal her feelings towards her boss. This time she responds by saying “angry/wrathful,” (*fen nu*) and yet another participant stands in for her anger. There are four people standing in the center now. “Yes,” says Dou, “It is possible now that you hold a grudge and don’t want to work anymore, or it leads to a confrontation.” He goes on to explain, speaking to the entire room, that the emotions—the anger, hate, and self-deprecation—are then pushed down and are left unexpressed. “You go home to your house after work,” he says, and he calls yet another participant up to the center to act as the first participant’s husband. They dramatize an argument, making accusations and yelling at one another, while the rest of her “emotions” are standing quietly behind her. The rest of the salon participants laugh at their caricature of a typical domestic argument, with its accusations and overly dramatized tension.

When the laughter dies down, Dou speaks, “This is our usual mode of emotion. It doesn’t lead to much satisfaction in life and often causes eruptions. We might then be motivated to study this stuff on self-development. And so we read many books.” At this point, I am asked

to stand in the drama, representing “books written by foreigners,” much to the amusement of all. Dou continues, “And we put so much pressure on ourselves to change. So we read even more. But now we need to really *face* our emotions,” he says as he turns the bodies of the participants—the emotions—to face one another. They examine one another tentatively. The air in the room is heavy. The emotions take on a life of their own and begin to transform. Anger is tough. Depression backs away. But then Anger begins to cry, and Depression moves in to comfort her.

“We call anger a negative emotion,” Dou interjects, “But this is just a label. And by deeming it negative, it may cause us to suppress it. It will rebound if we suppress it too ruthlessly. And this shifts the condition of the whole person.” He gives the example of what might have happened if the child were to have come into the room, wanting attention from his mother, at some point during the marital conflict. This would only add more pressure, he explains, causing the mother to really explode. When this happens, he continues, the *qi* of the mother’s anger literally goes into the child’s body, and the child experiences terror. This serves as the ultimate moral of the story: we cannot neglect the inner parts of ourselves. We need to look at them, face them. If we don’t, then our relationships will suffer, and the people we love will suffer. At this point, the exercise concludes and we return to our seats.

In this example, the central participant is continuously probed to discover the full range of her imagined emotional response to being criticized by her boss. Although it is a hypothetical situation used to introduce people to the work, it is a strongly pedagogical, moral, and emotionally charged interaction. As a teaching strategy, the interaction first offers Teacher Dou an opportunity to demonstrate a psychotherapeutic model of personhood in which emotions are complex, internal phenomena that need to be “mined” through a kind of excavation process in order to be known. The excavation, as he portrays it, ideally moves back and forth, though not necessarily linearly, between guided inquiry, consciously felt embodied experience, and a consciously directed verbalization or expression.

In the model of personhood conveyed here, conceptual engagement with texts, even foreign books that offer an alternative ideology of emotion, is therefore only a beginning. To truly “shift your condition” requires an embodied expression of the emotions, including a direct embodied engagement with each feeling as an individual entity. In this interaction, like many in inner child EP settings in China, highly charged emotional expression is thus purposely invoked. The emotions that Dou draws out of our central participant here are clearly “hers” (she feels a knot in her throat; she clenches her fists when she feels anger). This brings a decidedly co-constructed quality to the interaction, and yet the process is also intricately guided by the facilitator through leading statements, such as his suggestion that all of her feelings lead to a decreased desire to work or perhaps cause her to be confrontational with her boss. We could say that, in many senses, Teacher Dou produces her feelings as much as he unearths them or that the pedagogical interaction itself generates the specific emotions (Goodwin 2000; Ochs 2012; Wilce 2009). His continuous work to accomplish this production, as well as his further efforts to guide the entire enactment by setting up a dramatic encounter with her spouse and suggesting an even more dramatic (and harmful) encounter with her

child, demonstrates that Teacher Dou is engaged in significant “metalinguistic labor” (Carr 2011:125) here where he teaches, through concerted effort, that the right way (or the healthy way) to acknowledge inner emotional experience is to feel it, first, and most importantly, to later articulate it with precise language, lest it explode in the face of intimate others.

The pedagogical tool of using multiple participants to demonstrate this “truth” is significant. In this enacted scenario, which comprises iconic representations of professional, marital, and parental situations, is also an invitation for other individuals to literally act as icons of the central participant’s feelings. Each “feeling” is thus brought to life in the form of a person acting it out. The “inside” of the central participant is therefore enacted “outside” in the form of other people’s embodied expressions. This type of situated enactment often leads to a great deal of personal release for everyone involved. So although there was no overt crying in this example, it is common in this setting to see a participant who is enacting another participant’s emotions break down in tears. When this happens, the facilitator and others associated with the center rush to the crying participant, embracing them and rocking them back and forth as they cry. In this way, one person’s inner emotional work, when enacted outside the person, becomes the inner work of others as well. Situated enactments thus distribute emotion across multiple bodies in such a way that inner/outer distinctions, a critical focus in the psychotherapeutic ideology of inner child work, become blurred, and the experience of one individual emerges as a conarrated interaction among many.

It is important to note here that this particular pedagogical technique of enacting specific emotions deviates from inner child work as taught by the European psychologist who is Dou’s teacher. It does so by drawing in enactment components from family constellation therapy, in which multiple individuals are required to act out the various individuals comprising a central participant’s family such that he or she can witness some of the underlying emotional dynamics shaping family patterns. By turning this dramatic enactment into an opportunity for specific emotions to come alive, however, I argue that Dou effectively draws upon the classical notion of *resonance* (described above) as a resource to transform inner child ideologies into something that falls into perfect alignment with the propensity that participants have to play with the fluidity between inner and outer. This use of resonance as a conceptual resource for explaining inner child work is echoed in Dou’s choice to use the term “anger-qi” as an explanation of how negative emotion travels within the family unit.

Like the American addiction therapists that Carr studied, Dou’s pedagogical and metalinguistic efforts have multiple effects. First, as referenced above, he conveys a model of personhood and attendant semiotic ideology that bears a great resemblance to the “quintessentially American” (Carr 2011:150) ideology of inner reference, described in detail above. In this ideology of language and personhood, we recall, emotional experience is located within the individual prior to its dialogic evocation, and therapy is a process of self-discovery that is disclosed in language. Dou’s reliance on terms like “suppression” invoke an image of the self as a container within which unacknowledged emotions fester and later explode, though “labeling” emotions is clearly not enough. Here, Dou secondly teaches the embodied or “spiritual” component of inner child EPs through an exercise that purposefully invokes

feeling in participants, though this feeling, it is clear, must be consistently moderated by an emerging discursive consciousness that is able to slip back and forth between feeling and speaking. The epistemology of the self as container is further translated through Dou's singular efforts into an enacted scenario that draws upon classical ideologies of emotions as resonant. Finally, Dou's reliance on iconic representations of typical everyday professional and domestic scenarios further highlights his effort to transform inner child EPs into a framework that might be immediately graspable to his Chinese participants.

As an example of living translation, this excerpt demonstrates the centrality of both interaction and embodied experience in the enactment of inner child EPs in China. Though inscribed linguistic translations are indexed in the reference to "books written by foreigners," it is clear here that the translations in those texts are brought to life in interactions that can be understood more as "semiotic entanglements" (Carr 2011:2) replete with the semiotic efforts of both facilitator and participants. Such entanglements, moreover, can be seen as productive forces, as they produce both new ways of thinking and speaking about emotions and new ways of "doing" inner child EPs in China. From a single interaction, then, we can glean a process similar to what Agha refers to as "text-level indexicality," in which every interaction is inherently shaped and reshaped by an "emergent type of information that reflexively shapes the construal of behavior while the behavior is still under way" (2007:24). Here, however, we can perhaps speak more appropriately of a society-level indexicality, in which the interaction itself indexes a whole set of social issues occurring at this particular moment in Chinese history, including possible tensions in a hierarchical professional environment, tensions in marital relationships, and pressures to be a good mother and wife despite stress at work.

A Mother's Dilemma

This instance happens right away during introductions on the night described at the opening of this article. One participant, speaking relatively early in the circle, explains that she has a great deal of experience with this type of material, has been to several inner child workshops and wants to go deeper, which is why she is attending the circle. Teacher Dou asks her what her issue is. She explains that after attending many inner child workshops and going deeper into herself, she seemingly has discovered what she really wants to do with her life. However, it requires that she go abroad to study a particular skill for at least a year. The problem is that she has a young child who would not be able to come with her. She has decided to leave, but there are doubts in her heart (*xinli*). She questions how much a child needs her mother. All of her self-development work has led to this moment, this decision to learn a particular skill that will change her career. She has been looking for years for what she really wants to do, and now she has found it. But all of her education thus far in life tells her that she needs to stay with her child. "A Chinese mother in particular needs to stay with her child," she states several times. She goes back and forth over the story for some time, without resolution.

Dou halts introductions momentarily to focus on this participant. He asks everyone in the room to describe what they were feeling when she was talking. The group responds, calling out various emotions in a "popcorn-style" group response. The terms that are called out

include “confusion,” “worry,” “courage,” “persistence,” and “joy,” among others. Teacher Dou says “good” between each term thrown into the circle and then offers a longer response:

“We all experienced something different. Her speech just now contained a great deal of information, much of which affects us directly in our hearts, in different ways. This process can teach each of us what we feel and what is most important to us. But it can also teach her how much is going on for her, help her to get clear—so many different perspectives. Let’s focus on the emotions. What are the main emotions here?”

More group responses follow, including “concern,” “dissatisfaction with her present situation,” and “excitement about the future.” Dou agrees, reminding them that she has been looking for this for a long time and reiterating that there are other complex emotions concurrently pulling at her. He uses this as an introduction to the rest of the evening, explaining that we will be exploring how we can go about clearly differentiating (*shibie*) the many different types of emotions in our inner hearts, as well as the related thoughts and the roots of the emotions. When we can do this, he explains, it leads to clarity of self and the ability to sort out and release or set free (*jiefang diao*) our emotions, possibly leading to more alignment with the decision our inner heart is calling for (*zhaohuan*). He thanks the first participant and guides the group back into the process of introducing themselves.

As opposed to the last example, which was a hypothetical scenario, this interactive sequence portrays the ways in which one participant’s real experience is handled in the group. After she introduces herself as someone who already has significant experience with this type of inner work but still wants to “go deeper,” Teacher Dou redirects the collective activity (introductions) by asking her to be more specific about what is troubling her. The description she offers is full of tension: her “self-development work” thus far has finally led her to her dream; however, this dream entails acting against all of her previous socialization into how to fulfill her role as a good “Chinese mother,” who “needs to stay with her child.” With just a brief description of her suffering, the participant indexes multiple salient sociocultural themes that likely resonate with many other group members, at least based on their own introductions. In particular, gendered expectations related to being a “good mother” resound in her narrative, implicating also the notion the family as a unit that in many instances is diametrically opposed to the individual, inner work that the group is engaged in.

While she is speaking, the tension in the room is palpable. Teacher Dou seizes this opportunity to involve the rest of the group in the interaction in a concerted way, probing them for detailed descriptors of the chief participant’s emotional experience. Despite the fact that their responses, including “confusion,” and “courage,” among other feelings, could perhaps open up an opportunity for Dou to lecture on the broad cultural themes indexed in the participant’s now co-constructed narrative, this is not what happens. Instead, after offering his approval to each participant who offers a descriptor, Dou shifts his focus away from the participant or her narrative and on to the process itself. He explains how just the act of listening to someone’s experience can generate in “us” a range of emotions that have value for both the individual who is responsively feeling and the one who is speaking. Again, here,

Dou thus labors to emphasize the resonant qualities of emotional experience, noting that the sharing of these experiences with the speaker can help her, but it can also help the ones producing the evaluations. He explicitly uses it as a lesson in the main topic of the night: that *differentiation* and *naming* of emotions, located in the depths of the *self* but also accessible through a dialogic engagement with others, is a prerequisite for accessing the truth that the *heart* is *calling for*, which can only happen once the specific emotions are *released/set free* through identification, if not expression.

As in the first example, Teacher Dou here draws upon a psychotherapeutic model of personhood in which emotion is a fuzzy, unclear complex of inner experiences that requires a dialogic, guided process of examination. This laborious metalinguistic and pedagogical process, which he demonstrates through the use of specific emotion terms as well as a growing set of concepts that convey the unique psychotherapeutic and semi-spiritual language, or *register*, of inner child work, demands differentiation and articulation of emotions so that they can be properly released from the cage of the self. This release, moreover, is necessary for health, a precondition that suggests the ideology of inner reference. The act of naming or labeling such feelings is thus portrayed as powerful, in and of itself, and can be especially powerful when resonated through the heart–minds of observing participants. Such power, it becomes clear in this example, is a personal power that transforms *self* rather than concerning itself with social processes. Relevant here is Ivy’s critique of inner child work as focused upon “solely the matter of an internalized, familialized self” (1993:243) rather than looking outward at broad structural inequalities that might shape the suffering of the individual. Yang likewise emphasizes the ways in which psychotherapeutic discourse, especially in contemporary China, functions to “mask the government’s inability to provide for its people with structural remedies” (2015:6). I will return to this perspective below.

Quiz

This interaction again occurs on the summer evening above, after all participants have introduced themselves and Teacher Dou has offered another short lecture on emotions versus reactions. The lecture’s take-home message is clear: we need to love ourselves (*ai ziji*) by recognizing and caring for our deepest emotions. We must do so in order to be able to love others. This moral orientation of self–other serves as an introductory framework to the following exercise, in which Dou quizzes the group on their ability to identify emotions and differentiate them from thoughts, beliefs, or reactions.

It goes something like this: Dou reads a statement, such as “I am sad,” and the group members call out “emotion” or “thought,” etc. For many of the statements, the exercise proceeds smoothly and rapidly. “I am annoyed” clearly references an emotion, as do the statements “I am discouraged,” or “I am afraid.” Others are more complex, however, and provoke extended group discussions that provide opportunities for Dou to teach, as well as occasions for the participants to negotiate, in interaction, the meaning of their own emotional experience. For example, Dou highlights the statement, “I can’t do it,” while clearly a belief, as an index of deeper, underlying feelings of inferiority (*zibei*). These *feelings*, he emphasizes, are the core of what we must access and “manage” (*chuli*) in order for us to be available to

others. It therefore becomes incredibly important to be able to “peel apart” the belief from the emotions. The statement, “I’m at work and I’m going to go crazy,” is similar: a belief about the underlying feeling of being about to explode from suppressed anger that one no longer has the ability to control.

The exercise transitions when the participant introduced in the second example, who discussed her own complex situation of wanting to pursue her dreams of studying abroad but feels conflict about leaving her husband and young child in China, questions what this exercise might have to do with her. Teacher Dou probes her to reveal more about her feelings, leading her by saying “Your husband doesn’t want you to go— you feel. . . .” She responds, “I feel like I’m not a good wife; I’m not doing what a wife should do,” to which Dou in turn responds by asking the group: “Are these statements she is making beliefs or reactions or emotions?” The group is firm in their response: they are beliefs. This provides an opportunity for Dou to talk about how there is a situation and then there is the belief about the situation. And yet beneath those beliefs are the emotions.

Our participant is still somewhat vexed, and so a dramatic enactment follows wherein different participants are called up to portray each of her own self-referencing statements, including her dreams, her sense of responsibility, her fear, and so on. In this enactment, the participant enacts each of these components—identified as emotion, thought, or belief—and is encouraged to express their feelings and to interact with each other as a display of the participant’s internal environment. Throughout the exercise, the participant is asked if the enactment is correct, if it feels right. There are several jokes during this process, despite its high intensity. The class erupts in laughter when she expresses her concern that if she leaves, her child will one day have to attend inner child workshops like this one in order to heal. The exercise resolves, however, only after Dou has successfully conveyed the “reality” that beneath all of these statements lie deep emotions that relate to her inner child. Once he has encouraged them all to interact with one another and to choose to “walk together” rather than remain at odds, the participant states that she feels better now that she has “remembered this,” though it is still unclear what her decision will be.

In this example, which moves from a general discussion of emotion to a specific engagement with one participant’s experience, we again see Teacher Dou’s efforts to teach a specific model of personhood. Here, emotions are figured as the deepest forms of experience that underlie all types of beliefs, situations, and thoughts. They constitute the deep, messy *core* of the self, which must be *managed* through a process of inquiry that *peels apart* the feelings from the belief and/or situation so that *self-love* can be realized. “Self-love” is thus depicted here as the concern and care towards what is happening at a deep emotional level, “underneath” thoughts, reactions, judgments, or events.

In this example, as above, we see several terms that are central to the register of inner child language introduced here (e.g., *core*, *management*, *peeling apart*, *self-love*). The model of selfhood presented is likewise consistent with the previous examples, where we saw Teacher Dou’s use of terms and concerted metalinguistic labor to convey an ideology of inner

reference in which preexisting emotions underlie a person's thoughts and beliefs and require expression for a person to be truly healthy. The dialogic digging process, it becomes clear, can be likened to the process of "taking inventory" that Carr describes as "boring down through internal layers of denial, anger, and shame toward the innermost storehouse of the self, taking stock of and verbally relaying all that was encountered along the way" (2011:94). The "bringing to life" of the inventory-taking process, however, is again unique to inner child work according to Teacher Dou, as we recall from the first example that the dramatic enactment technique that he uses here is actually a novel hybridization of family constellation therapy and inner child work that makes "inside" visible "outside" via resonance distributed across the bodies of participants.

Finally, this example follows examples one and two in indexing broader themes in Chinese society, namely struggles that the individual faces as she seeks to fulfill herself in light of gendered family expectations. It is especially interesting to note here that the participant's social dilemma is again left relatively untreated. Instead, the focus on her *self*, and her emotions, leads us as observers to speculate on what is actually happening here. Perhaps, we question, the point is not to figure out a practical solution to the participant's dilemma so much as to teach the ideology of inner reference according to inner child EP. This example thus seemingly implies that once we differentiate, feel, and acknowledge our inner emotions, socially complex situations will resolve themselves. The relief that the participant feels when she "remembers" to acknowledge all of her complex feelings seems to be final and transformative. So again in this example we see hints of the ways in which inner child EPs systematically erase opportunities for participants to comment on structural inequalities or really anything outside of themselves (Ivy 1993; Yang 2015; see also Carr 2011:126).

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that the translation of inner child EPs in China is a process that involves the situated translation of a specific terminology, way of speaking, and way of "doing emotion" that can best be understood as a linguistic and semiotic register of inner child work. I have shown that terms such as "self-love," "true self," "small self," along with common terms that are given new meaning within the semiotic landscape of inner child EPs (e.g., "core," "manage," or "release") are translated into Chinese vis-à-vis dialogic, pedagogical interactions that simultaneously distill and expand upon the inner child psychospiritual ideology of selfhood and emotion. Teacher Dou's metalinguistic efforts to teach participants how to navigate their "inner" emotions vis-à-vis the ideology of inner reference, I have further demonstrated, involves a great deal more than simply the translation of a terminological register. It also functions to *translate selves* through a unique pedagogical practice of distributing emotion across multiple bodies and helping participants to "remember" their true selves.

I have also argued that the specific interactions that take place in inner child salons can be understood as semiotic moments that index an array of sociocultural and historical ideologies and circumstances in contemporary China. Kuan's statement that "emotion work has

broader implications for the shaping of . . . ethical subjectivity” (2015:100) is thus central to understanding what is occurring in these workshops and salons. The individualistic goals of the salons are thus situated in the shifting moral ground that exists in contemporary Chinese society (Kleinman et al. 2011:23). Similarly, the training that participants receive can be seen as deeply tied to the “wider social forces” that Kipnis identifies as a type of “enslavement” (2012:7), and Kuan understands as evidence of an emerging form of Chinese governmentality in which inner life is subject to government regulated moral demands (2015:98–99). From this vantage point, the sense of personal empowerment felt by many of the participants is perhaps not so personal after all. In fact, the extreme focus on the self to the exclusion of any discussion of the social and moral forces implicating an exhausted mothers’ uncontrolled emotions in the damaging of a child, for example, or the complex relationship dynamics that make it impossible for a mother to follow her dream without leaving her child, becomes especially problematic. Again, the critique that Ivy (1993) levels at inner child work as a technique that glorifies self-work to the exclusion of social engagement is relevant here. In China, Yang (2015) argues, an extreme focus on the self serves to cloak the shortcomings of the current government at the same time as it places the blame for unhappiness incorrectly on the individual. The notion that inner child work in China is part and parcel of what many scholars have argued to be nothing more than a different brand of consumer-oriented narcissistic culture (see Heelas 2008) is important to consider. Heelas (2008), however, argues that participants themselves (many of whom reject the idea that they are perpetuating a narcissistic, consumerist culture) need to be taken seriously. Without rejecting the possibility that inner child workshops in China are deeply problematic, I argue that the study of their translation through specific interactions can teach us a great deal about the complex dynamics of emotion, selfhood, and the searching for cultural change in contemporary China.

By situating these interactions within the framework of living translation, which points to the ongoing translation of multiple psychological and spiritual discourses in China, I argue that the close study of specific encounters offer unique ethnographic insight into how translation is enacted. As both a theoretical and methodological framework, living translation thus offers a unique lens for studying the global circulation of EPs. This lens builds upon and contributes to traditional debates on “hybridity” (e.g., Anthias 2001; Hannerz 1992; Kompridis 2005; Latour 1993; Pieterse 2001; Stewart 2004; Stross 1999; Werbner and Modood 1997) by focusing on the moment-to-moment strategic blending of various ideologies and practices that themselves are thoroughly wrapped up in complex personal and social trajectories. Living translation thus offers insight into the specific encounters and personal experiences that comprise what Lydia Liu (1995) has referred to as “translingual practice.” While the results of such encounters—in terms of the translation of EPs or even specific terms—are necessarily temporary, the study of them can offer a glimpse of the global circulation of EPs through the complex lives of both instructors and students.

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