

“Your Secrets Are Safe with me”: Opening Prison Counseling

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Received: December 28, 2012 Accepted: January 11, 2013 Available online: January 24, 2013

doi:10.11114/smc.v1i1.53

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/smc.v1i1.53>

Abstract

Prison counseling aims to aid inmate clients in understanding and solving problems by themselves, while problems that could be talked about or will be talked about during counseling are built on earlier sequences that occur in the opening of prison counseling. By focusing on 9 counseling sessions conducted in 2 different prisons in southern China and using discursive psychology as the methodological tool, this study explores how the police counselors open the counseling in order to prepare the inmate clients for the following troubles talk. The primary concern is how the police counselors construct prison counseling while attending to accountability issues.

Keywords: prison counseling, discursive psychology, interaction, construction

1. Introduction

The first prison in China came into being in Xia Dynasty over 4,000 years ago, and the prison's operation, function, architecture and philosophy have undergone tremendous change. Since 1949, “the general philosophy of contemporary China holds that people can be changed, and the great majority of prisoners can be reformed” (Wu, 2003: 94). In order to fulfill the rehabilitative function of the prison, different treatment programs were designed and provided to inmates. The three well-recognized traditional tools to reform inmates in China are education, labor and prison administration. With increasing emphasis on evaluating rehabilitation programs by the recidivism rate, new knowledge from other fields and other countries has been introduced into China's criminal justice system. Prison counseling as a new intervening tool did not begin in China until 1989 but has been ranked as the fourth tool to correct and educate inmates. Counseling in the prison is considered to be conducive to mental health keeping, recidivism reducing, and order maintaining in the prison, and “inmates with psychological help often have a better chance at rehabilitation” (Zhu, 2007). There are now over 90% of prisons in which counseling services are provided. However, there have been doubts and suspicions about the effectiveness of counseling conducted in the context of the prisons, for “the challenge consists of promoting personal power in people whose lives have become circumscribed to varying degrees and whose very existence has been devalued and even criminalized” (Van Wormer, 1999:51).

Because the debate regarding whether treatment programs provided to inmates work and reduce recidivism rates has raged, some researchers try to prove that prison counseling could help stop criminals from reoffending (e.g. Fox, 1954; Whiteley & Hosford, 1983; Durcan, 2008; Correia, 2009). In Durcan's opinion (2008), mental health services offered to inmates could make a difference to their lives, for it could help them feel more confident about their future. Fox (1954) finds that counselors in the prison “provide an emotional object to which the inmate can relate in transference and countertransference in a therapeutic situation” (p.289). Kadish et al. (1999) compare the recidivism rates of the juvenile delinquents who have received counseling services to a control group who have not. The results show that only 25% of the juvenile delinquents who received counseling reoffended, whereas 64% of the youths in the control group reoffended. Ma et al. (2007) analyze the effectiveness of counseling provided to juvenile delinquents in China by comparing the results of SCL-90 (symptom check list-90) before and after group counseling therapy. They conclude that counseling therapy could to a great extent alleviate depression and anxiety of criminals. Some prisons in China have reported achievements made in prison counseling by citing exemplary cases in which some inmates have changed from repeatedly breaking prison rules and regulations or being defiant towards prison officials and fellow inmates to being well-behaved and even awarded prizes after several counseling sessions. Thereby, the causal relationship

between mental health services and recidivism reduction is established. However, research results based on data drawn from surveys, questionnaires or experiments are considered problematic for wiping out many of their interactional features (Potter & Wiggins, 2007), and reports of case studies with successful outcomes are neither instrumental to the improvement of prison counseling practices nor persuasive enough to prove the causal relationship between prison counseling and the change in inmates. What is lacking in these studies and reports is the recognition that prison counseling is an interactional process by means of conversation. In addition, considering factors such as security or cost, the majority of prison counseling services in China are provided by counselors in police uniform. Whether these counselors could play down their identities as prison officials and interact with inmate client based on counseling theories and technologies originated from the west have been called into question.

2. Method

The turn to language “have influenced both the theory of psychotherapy and the research of therapy process” (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007: 157). Avdi (2008) has advocated that language-based analysis is coextensive with psychoanalytic psychotherapy because they both focus on the process of meaning making and aim to interpret language use in the context. Developed out of discourse analysis in the 1980s, discursive psychology (hereafter DP) draws on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (1958), ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967), conversation analysis (e.g. Schegloff, 1968; Sacks, 1992), Austin’s speech act theory (1962) and Billig’s (1996) rhetorical strategies (in particular his concepts of persuasion and particularization). DP has made a breakthrough in our understanding and analysis of psychological phenomenon. DP is different from cognitive or social psychology in that language is not treated as a pathway to objective truth, and psychology in DP is considered to be practical, accountable, situated, embodied and displayed (Potter, 2005). Therefore, rather than regarding what people say reflects their underlying mental state, DP focuses on how psychological entities such as attitudes, identities, and memory are constructed by participants in their interaction. Unlike researches using quantitative approaches that are described as “rigorous, hardheaded, and scientific” (Marecek, 2003: 51), DP prefers naturally occurring data as the object of research in order to explore the richness and complexity of utterances of interactants. The inconsistencies and variability in the talk are regarded as meaningful and worthwhile to be examined.

DP espouses the importance of methodological rigor and advocates a close scrutiny of the specific utterances and contexts. In accordance with discursive action model (hereafter DAM) developed by Edwards and Potter (1992), DP analysis could be done by considering the following three sections: (1) action. Traditionally, language is regarded as the medium that reflects the mental inside or the reality outside, but DP analysts study how speakers accomplish certain action by designing what to say and how to say in the contexts; (2) fact and interest. DP studies how speakers resort to different discursive devices to make their description of people or events sound real against alternatives and manage the dilemma of stakes or interests; and (3) accountability. When people produce accounts, their interaction is considered as a site of accountability and responsibility placing. By analyzing what participants want to accomplish via speaking and how they construct their utterances without being undermined as interested and handle issues of responsibility, DAM provides particular focuses for discursive psychology researches.

3. Discourse

This paper is part of the researcher’s PhD work aiming to investigate how prison counseling is conducted in China’s prison. The data in this study was collected lasting from May, 2010 to June, 2011 either through participant observation after permission to record was obtained from both parties attending prison counseling or by downloading video recordings stored in computers without seeking permission from the inmate clients. A signed paper is provided to the prisons under study, promising not to disclose any information of all the parties involved. In the present paper, the opening stage of 9 counseling sessions conducted in two southern prisons in China is discussed. Hansen et al. (1982) regards establishing “a good relationship so that the client feels comfortable enough to present and work on the problem” (p. 258) as the principal task in the first interview. The inmate clients come to counseling voluntarily, however, they might “approach the criminal justice counselor with suspicion, tentativeness, ambivalence, and fear” (Masters, 2004: 33). They bring their preconceived ideas of counseling and talks with prison officials with them and might decide in advance the extent to which they would like to reveal to police counselors. In order to create a friendly ambience in which the inmate clients are willing to open up and discuss their problems, the police counselors have to develop a working relationship with the clients and win their trusts within 45-minute time constraints. Warming-up talk at the beginning of counseling plays an important role in the initial contact between the two parties, especially between those who have never met before.

Though the researcher could have access to detailed background information of all the inmates and prison officials, this paper chooses to provide a rough profile of all the participants for confidentiality. All the counselors are uniformed prison officials who have obtained certificates of counseling required by the prison. Some of them are graduates with backgrounds in psychology, medicine, or sociology and some are graduates from police academy majoring in criminal justice or the law. As for inmate clients in this paper, they all come to the counseling voluntarily and differ in age, the length of prison term, crime types, educational background, etc.

The transcription convention employed is not strictly Jeffersonian system (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984: ix-xvi). Phonetic features such as pauses, intonation, vocalic lengthening, length of silence, and overlaps were transcribed. The first version of data is in Chinese pinyin. Each utterance is first glossed English word by word in the second version and the literal meaning of the original Chinese is provided in the third version. Due to differences between Chinese and English in word order and sentence structure, both transcriptions and translations are made to provide necessary information while at the same time attending to readability. For the purpose of anonymity, all names are pseudonymed with Chen representing all the police counselors and Wang, Zhao, Sun, Qian, etc. for the inmate clients. Any information that might disclose their identities is either changed or deleted.

4. Analysis

All prison counseling sessions in this study begin with a summons-answer sequence (Schegloff, 1968), with summons made by the custodial officials and answers by the inmate clients in the waiting room. After the inmate client enters the counseling room, the first speaker is always the police counselor who either greets or invites the inmate client to have a seat. The period from the first utterance of the police counselors to their enquiries into the problems that drive the inmate clients to the counseling is defined as the opening stage, which lasts from 58 seconds to 3.12 minutes. Main activities at this stage consist of greeting, identification, enquiry, and introduction of counseling, which are neither in strict order nor compulsory. Since most inmate clients have no prior experiences with counseling either before or during imprisonment, the police counselors' emphasis is on the introduction of what counseling is. In these 9 sessions, counseling is constructed as a talk based on voluntary participation, confidentiality, equality, and self-help.

4.1 Counseling Is a Talk Based on Voluntary Participation

Extract 1 (case 1)

- 01Chen: wo xiang wen yixia Oh, ni zhe-ci lai zixun, shi ni ziji,
I want ask briefly SFP you this-CL come counseling be you self
I want to ask whether you came to this counseling out of your own will
- 02 ziji xiang lai de// haishi zhong-dui yaoqiu ni lai de La?
self want come NOM or zhong-dui require you come NOM SFP
or your came because it was required by zhong-dui?
- 03Wang: //dui. dui. dui.
right right right
//Right. Right. Right.
- 04Wang: ziji.
self
Myself.
- (0.4)
- 05Chen: Oh. ni ziji// ziji lai de.
Oh you self self come NOM
Oh. You yourself //wanted to come.
- 06Wang: //Em.

Extract 2 (case 2)

- 01Chen: wo jiushi xiang wen yixia, ni lai zixun, shi:: jiu-shi-shuo,
I just want ask briefly you come counseling be that-is-to-say

- I just want to ask whether this counseling, that is to say,
- 02 *jian-qu li anpai ni lai,*
 jian-qu PR arrange you come
 was arranged by *jianqu*
- 03 *haishi ni ziji you zhe-ge yiyuan xiang lai,*
 or you self have this-CL willingness want come
 or you yourself had the willingness to come
- 04 *dao women zheli lai=*
 arrive we here come=
 to our place=
- 05Qian: =*wo shi ziji shenqing guolai de=*
 I be self apply come NOM
 =I myself applied to come here =
- 06Chen: =*ziji, ziji you zhe-ge yiyuan guolai de=*
 self self have this-CL willingness come NOM
 =Yourself. You yourself had the willingness to come here=
- 07Qian: =*dui=*
 right
 =Right=
- 08Chen: =*yinwei zhe shi zui zhongyao de. ruguo ni ziji bu-yuanyi gen women liao,*
 because this be SP important NOM if you self N-willing PR we talk
 =Because this is the most important. If you yourself do not want to talk with us,
- 09 *women xiang, ruguo jian-qu li anpai ni guolai, na-shi (.) women,*
 we think if *jian-qu* PR arrange you come that-be we
 in our opinion, if *jian-qu* arranged you to come here. That is (.) our talk
- 10 *name meiyou-biyao. gen zhe-ge zixun yuanze ye-shi xiang weibei de.*
 then N-necessary PR this-CL counseling principle also-be PR against NOM
 is then not necessary. It also goes against the principle of counseling.

In extracts 1 and 2, both police counselors begin their counseling with the enquiry into whether the inmate clients came voluntarily. In reply, both inmate clients provide affirmative responses. In extract 1, Client Wang's repetition of the agreement "right" (*dui*, line 3) even overlaps with the police counselor's utterances. Client Qian's response in extract 2 is also given as soon as the police counselor's enquiry is finished. His response is a complete sentence confirming his voluntary wish to the counseling, which is different from the one-word response in Extract 1. Both client Wang and Qian's early display that they know where the question is headed shows their alignment with the police counselors and projects their later cooperative actions. Instead of initiating a new topic, both counselors proceed to seek confirmation (line 5 in extract 1 and line 6 in extract 2). In the context of prisons, some inmate clients might come to the counseling involuntarily but are afraid to say so. The confirmation-seeking responses could be interpreted as the police counselors' intention to hand over the speaking floor in case the inmate clients want to provide a different reply.

The police counselor in extract 2 shifts his footing as he states the principle of counseling on a voluntary basis. In line 1, the police counselor uses the pronoun "I" (*wo*) constructing himself as the agent in his enquiry. The pronouns in his latter utterances were switched to the collective "we/us" (*women*, lines 4, 8 and 9). The shift of footing serves to inform the inmate client that the principle of voluntary counseling is not stipulated by him as an individual but guaranteed by the authority he represents, namely, the correctional center or the prison, and therefore is formal and authoritative. By resorting to the authority, the police counselor validates the principle of voluntary participation, which could serve to convince the inmate client that he has a choice in this situation.

Of note in these two extracts is the prevalent uses of the reflexive pronoun “(you)self” ((ni)ziji, lines 1, 2 and 5 in extract 1, and lines 3, 6, and 8 in extract 2). Usually, when inmates are required to have a talk with prison officials, they are supposed to comply no matter whether they like it or not. The police counselors’ repetition of the reflexive pronoun, together with confirmation-seeking enquiries and resorting to the authority fulfill the following functions: (1) emphasizing that prison counseling is based on voluntary participation, and thereby constructing prison counseling as different from talks going on in other situations within the prison, and (2) placing the responsibility upon the inmate clients to share and speak up in the ensuing counseling, for it has been enquired and confirmed that no one else forced them to the counseling.

4.2 Counseling Is a Talk Based on Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to counselors’ responsibilities for keeping secrets and respecting clients’ right to privacy. Even in institutions such as hospitals and schools, it is not easy for clients to confide themselves to counselors without hesitation. As for counseling in prisons in which the primary mission is security and control, confidentiality is especially a sensitive concern, and “where and when confidentiality can and cannot be maintained will contribute to creating the atmosphere of trust necessary for successful counseling” (Masters, 2004: 167)

Extract 3 (case 2)

- 01Chen: ni: gen wo liao de yixie shiqing Oh, Em, wo dou you yi-ge
 you PR I talk NOM some thing SFP Em I all have one-CL
 Regarding what you:: tell me, Em. I all have one.
- 02 ji-yu yi-ge baomi yuanze ti ni bao-mi. bu-hui shuo xiang
 base-on one-CL confidential principle for you keep-secrets N-will say PR
 I’ll keep secrets for you based on the principle of confidentiality. I will not
- 03 nimen jian-qu-de:: jing-guan huozheshi Uh duizhang qu huibao,
 you jian-qu-GEN police-officer or Uh captain go report
 report to prison officers or captains in your *Jian-qu*,
- 04 huozhe zenmeyang de Oh.
 or how NOM SFP
 or do any other things..... (utterances omitted)

Since all the inmate clients in this study do not have prior counseling experiences either before or during incarceration, the counselor first informs the inmate client of his ethical obligation of confidentiality in line 2. Considering the inmate client’s concerns about whether he could adhere to this principle, the police counselor elaborates on what he will not do in lines 2-4. The abstract concept of confidentiality is then reformulated to more detailed restrictions. The addition “do any other things” (huozhe zenmeyang, line 4) is an extreme case formulation, excluding other possible behaviors of disclosing the client’s secrets to stakeholders within or outside of the prison. By deploying restriction reformulation and extreme case formulations, the police counselor is in fact making promises to the inmate client and attributing himself the responsibilities for observing the principle of confidentiality.

Extract 4 (case 6)

- 01chen: wo xian gen ni shuo, jiu-shi xinlizixun, qi-shi:: jiu deng-yu shuo shi Uh:
 I first PR you tell that-is counseling in-fact just equal-to say be Uh:
 I’ll tell you first that counseling is in fact, as much as to say, Uh:
- 02 (.) shouxian shi baomi de. jiu-shi-shuo, ni gen wo shuo de hua,
 first be confidential NOM that-is-to-say you PR I say NOM words
 (.)First of all, it is confidential. That is to say, what you tell me
- 03 haiyou wo gen ni shuo de hua,
 and I PR you say NOM words
 and what I tell you

- 04 zuihaoshi zhi juxian-yu women liang-ge ren zhijian zhidao.
had-better-be only limited-to we two-CL people between know
had better be just between two of us.
- 05 Uh: ni bu-yao ba wo-de hua gen wairen qu shuo
Uh you N-will BA I-GEN words PR outsiders go say
Uh: You do not tell outsiders what I tell you,
- 06 ranhou wo ye bu-hui ba ni-de hua gen wairen qu shuo.
then I also N-will BA you-GEN words PR outsider go say
and I will also not tell outsiders what you tell me.
- 07 jiu-shi-shuo, women liang-ge ren zhijian shuo de hua,
that-is-to-say we two-CL people between say NOM words
That is to say, what is talked about between us
- 08 dou-shi:: huxiang baomi de (.) zhe shi yi-ge (.) Uh:: suoyi,
all-be mutual confidential NOM this be one-CL Uh so
is mutually confidential (.) This is one thing (.) Uh:: So,
- 09 zai-zhe-fangmian, ni bu-xuyao you shenme tai-duo-de gulv
in-this-respect you N-need have what too-much-GEN worry
you needn't worry too much in this respect,.
- 10 ranhou wo ye bu-xiwang ni ba wo shuo de hua, Hehe,
then I also N-hope you BA I say NOM words laughter
And I also hope that you will not tell what I tell you, Hehe,
- 11 dao waimian qu gen qita ren qu jiang, zhe shi diyi-ge
arrive outside go PR other people go tell this be first-CL
to other people outside. This is the first..... (utterances omitted)

Different from extract 3, both parties in this extract are obligated to keep secrets. In lines 1-2, the police counselor first states that confidentiality is the priority in counseling, and then resorts to the device of restriction reformulation from line 2 through line 8 to define how both of them observe this principle. The responsibilities for keeping confidentiality are constructed as mutual (line 8). In line 8, the counselor seems to finish the explanation of this principle by concluding that “this is one thing” (zhe shi yi-ge), but initiates a self-repair. The continuer “Uh” serves to help the police counselor maintain the speaking floor. From line 9 through line 11, what the inmate client is expected to do is reiterated. The utterance that “you needn’t worry too much” (ni bu-xuyao you shenme tai-duo-de gulv, line 9) indicates that the inmate client’s concerns over confidentiality issues have been attended to. The repetition of the client’s obligation (lines 10-11) helps to win the trust from the inmate client, for the inmate client is empowered to have access to the “secrets” of the police counselor and counted on not to have these “secrets” disclosed. In lines 4 and 7, the police counselor uses membership categorization device (Sacks, 1972) to categorize himself and the client as “us” (women), while other people as “outsiders” (wairen, lines 5 and 6) and “other people” (qita ren, line 11). Thereby, the counselor and the client is grouped into the same team sharing the same stakes or interests (Potter, 1996).

Considering the context of the prison in which the inmate clients have been deprived of freedom temporarily and most of their privacy as well, the police counselors construct prison counseling as different and a privilege for the inmate clients. However, there is one point which might arouse doubts about such construction. In order to encourage the inmate clients to speak out without worrying about possible consequences, the police counselors in both extracts 3 and 4 present themselves as secret keepers who will act in the best interest of the clients. What is lacking is the explanation of their duties to file the report to superiors and even take necessary precautions in an emergency when the inmate clients are found to display intentions of committing suicide, escaping or taking violent actions against fellow inmates or prison officials during counseling. The police counselors’ failure to inform inmate clients of the limits of confidentiality might on the contrary compromises the validity of their utterances, for inmates, especially veteran inmates, are fully aware of how the prison operates.

During the explanation of the principle of confidentiality, neither of the police counselors shows the intention of handing over the speaking floor to confirm whether the inmate clients have understood or have any doubts, making the explanation look like a formality that police counselors have to rush through.

4.3 Counseling Is a Talk Based on Equality

Counseling is supposed to be a talk between counselors and clients on an equal basis. Despite apparent power imbalances between police counselors and inmate clients in the context of the prison, the police counselors try to convince the inmate clients of their rights to equality.

Extract 5 (case 6)

- 01chen: dier-ge shi:: jiu-shi:: suiran ni xianzai shi fanren, wo shi min--jing,
 second-CL be that-is though you now be inmate I be police-officer
 The second is that though you are now an inmate and I'm a police officer,
- 02 danshi zuo xinlizixun de shihou, Uh:: (.)
 but do counseling NOM time Uh
 but during counseling, Uh:: (.)
- 03 women shuang-fang yinggai shuo dou shi pingdeng de.
 we both-sides should say all be equal NOM
 both of us should be equal.
- 04 dou shi yi-zhong xinli-shang-de yi-zhong jiaoliu.
 all be one-kind mental-PR-GEN one-kind communication
 It is a kind of mental communication.
- 05 Em::women buyao cunzai shuo. Uh:: (.) jiu-shi-shuo,
 Em we N-will exist say Uh that-is-to-say
 Em:: there should be no. Uh:: (.) That is to say,
- 06 wo shi min-jing, shi guan ren de,
 I be police-officer be control people NOM
 I'm a police officer who is to control
- 07 ni shi fanren, ni shi bei guan de.
 you be inmate you be PSV control NOM
 and you are an inmate who is to be controlled.
- 08 Uh: ranhou you yi-ge shenme, Em, duili de yi-ge guannian,
 Uh then have one-CL what Em opposite NOM one-CL idea,
 Uh: we should not have an opposite attitude towards each other,
- 09 hao-bu-hao↑
 ok-N-ok
 ok↑
- 10Zhao: hao=
 ok
 Ok=
- 11Chen: = Uh:: suoyi xiwang women zhijian-de jiaoliu
 Uh so hope we between-GEN communication
 = Uh:: So I hope that the communication between us
- 12 yinggai nenggou zuo-dao tan-cheng yixie,
 should could do-RVC frank-honest some

- should be more frankly and honestly.
- 13 Uh:: zhe-yang neng zuo-dao Ma? ni keyi Ma?
 Uh in-this-way could do-RVC QM you can QM
 Uh:: Can you do that? Can you?
- 14Zhao: keyi=
 can
 Yes=
- 15Chen: =Em. xing. Uh:: na (.) ni women jintian zhuyao tan shenme wenti Ne↑
 Em ok Uh then you we today main talk what problem SFP
 =Em. Ok. Uh::Then (.)You. What problems will we mainly discuss today↑

In this extract, the police counselor deploys role discourse to explicate how to observe the principle of equality. The police counselor first admits the existence of their respective roles other than counselor and client (line 1). The police counselor then obligates both parties to treat themselves as equal by using the modal verb “should” (yinggai, line 3), implicating that it is the right thing to do. The lexical choice of the term “communication” (jiaoliu) in line 4 and later in line 11 means an act to “share or exchange opinions, feelings, information, etc.” in accordance with the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. The counselor chooses this term to further emphasize that their talk is an exchange between two parties instead of lectures or orders given by one party.

Lines 6-7 is an interjection between lines 5 and 8 at which the police counselor reformulates this principle (line 1) by defining what both parties are supposed to do in accordance with their original roles, namely, one to control and the other to be controlled. The repetitive definition of their roles signals the police counselor’s awareness that their relationship is at the two extreme and thus a hindrance to achieving equality as required by the counseling. In order to solve this problem, two expectations are put forward by the police counselor: (1) they should not treat each other opposite (lines 5-9), and (2) the communication should be done in a frank and honest way (lines 11-12). It seems that the police counselor has placed on both parties the same responsibilities for treating each other as equal, as evidenced by his choice of the plural noun “we” (women, lines 3, 5 and 11). However, the inmate client instead of the police counselor is attributed to more responsibilities. In line 13, the police counselor raises two consecutive questions using modal verb “can”. The presumption is that the police counselor could treat the inmate client as equal and that the problem lies in the inmate client’s ability to observe this principle. Thereby, the counseling is constructed as a talk based on equality on the premise that the inmate client repositions his roles and does not tell lies.

The inmate client’s contribution of discourse in this extract is little. The tag question “ok” (hao-bu-hao, line 9) with a rising tone at the end of line 9 forces the inmate client to provide a reply in the form of yes/no. In line 13, questions about whether the inmate client could communicate frankly and honestly with the police counselor also require a positive/negative answer. In the context of prisons, these questions all project preferred responses, for any inmate who is not foolish knows how to please prison officials. Without doubt, the police counselor gets satisfactory answers as expected (lines 10 and 14). However, these answers are simple and concise without any complementary remarks. In other words, the answer provider might be either perfunctory or too inferior to provide a different answer.

4.4 Counseling Is a Talk Based on Self-help

Inmate clients, either mandatory or voluntary, approach counseling with some expectations, and appropriate expectation is vital to the outcome of counseling. Therefore, it is necessary that police counselors be aware of inmate clients’ expectations and set mutually agreed goals between them. On the one hand, “without a counseling agreement, there would be no course to follow” (Kratcoski, 2004: 269). On the other, clients with too high expectations of counseling are very likely to feel worse after the counseling if their needs are not satisfied.

Extract 6 (case 2)

- 01Chen: jiu-shi-shuo, xinlizixun Ne, shi yi-ge (.) bangzhu ni,
 that-is-to-say counseling SFP be one-CL help you
 In other words, counseling is a way (.) that helps you
- 02 zishen qu xun-zhao wenti de yi-ge Uh, yi-ge, yi-ge fangshi Oh.
 self go look-for problem NOM one-CL Uh one-CL one-CL way SFP

- find the problems on your own.
- 03 bu-shi shuo, Uh ni gen wo liao-le yixie kunnan,
N-be say Uh you PR I talk-PERF some difficult
It does not mean that, Uh, you tell me some troubles,
- 04 wo jiu neng, wo jiu neng bang ni qu jiejie. er shi shuo,
I then can I then can help you go solve but be say
and then I could help you solve them. But it is
- 05 tongguo women liaotian de qingkuang xia bangzhu
through we talk NOM condition PR help
through our talk that I help
- 06 ni ziji qu renshi wenti, qu gaishan ni ziji-de yi-ge xin-tai.
you self go know problem go improve you self-GEN one-CL state-of-mind
you understand problems on your own and improve your state of mind.
- 07 shi zhe-yang-de yi-ge guocheng, hao Ba?
be this-kind-GEN one-CL process ok SFP
It is such a process, ok?
- 08 Em. dazhi jiushi zhe-yang-de yi-ge qingkuang. name jintian Ne,
Em about be this-kind-GEN one-CL situation then today SFP
Em. This is the general introduction. Then today,
- 09 ni ye shi diyi-ci zuo zixun,
you also be first-CL do counseling
it is also your first counseling,
- 10 name, Em, women xianzai jiu :: zhengshi kaishi-le.
then Em we now then formal begin-PERF
then, Em. We formally begin now.

The basic principle of counseling is helping clients self-help (Zhang, 2007). The counselor in this extract defines counseling as a way to help clients to find problems and a process to change on their own (lines 1-7), thereby constructing himself as a facilitator and helper rather than a problem-solver. In line 7, the police counselor ends his introduction with a tag question “ok” (hao Ba) but does not seem to expect responses from the inmate client, for there is no apparent gap afterwards. Then the counselor makes a summary by stating that what above has been said is a general introduction (line 8) and declares that they will move to today’s main agenda (line 10). The construction of counseling as a process helping inmate clients to self-help provides a warrant against the inmate client’s any “unrealistic” expectations to have his troubles solved by the police counselor. Thereby, the responsibilities for the solution of problems are deflected from the police counselor if the inmate client is dissatisfied with the outcome of the counseling.

5. Counseling Claimed vs. Counseling Done

In the extracts above, the police counselors have prepared the inmate clients for the following main agenda of troubles talk by constructing prison counseling as a talk based on voluntary participation, confidentiality, equality, and self-help. Such a construction of counseling at the opening stage serves a range of discursive functions, including (1) allowing the counselors to display their cautious and objective stances and position themselves as different from other prison officials, (2) setting mutually-recognized principles and goals, and (3) ensuring and convincing the inmate clients that prison counseling is for the sake of them and therefore they should share their ideas and speak up.

Though what prison counseling is has been claimed explicitly, prison counseling is done implicitly problematic. On the one hand, what the police counselors, as authority figures in the prisons, are responsible for is stated in an ambiguous way. For example, the inmate clients’ right to equality is taken for granted in a context in which the physical environment is designed to isolate them and police officials are assigned to control them, and the police

counselors' exaggeration of inmate client's right to confidentiality is very likely to undermine the validity of the promises along with other utterances produced by the police counselors. On the other hand, the inmate clients are held accountable for the success of counseling. If the counseling turns out not as expected, the responsibilities are on the inmate clients who fail to be voluntary and honest, to position themselves equal to the police counselors, or to grasp the ability to self-help as required. In addition, activities other than the introduction of counseling at the opening stage also signal to the inmate clients that the counseling they are experiencing does not match the one the police counselors claim to be, which could be illustrated by such sequences as enquires into criminal history.

Extract 7 (case 3)

01Chen: Em. lai zheli duo-jiu-le?

Em come here how-long-PERF

Em. How long have you been here?

02Li: (.) kuai liang-ge-yue-le.

almost two-CL-month-PERF

(.) Almost two months.

03Chen: Em. nali ren Ne?

Em where people SFP

Em. Where are you from?

04Li: xxx=

(name of place)

05Chen: =xxx Ah? na ni shi yinwei shenme shiqing jin-lai de La?

name of place SFP then you be because what thing come-in NOM SFP

=xxx Ah? What crime did you commit?

06Li: tou fang weixian wupin.

throw put dangerous product

Throwing dangerous substance.

07Chen: Ah↑

08Li: tou fang weixian wupin.

throw put dangerous product

Throwing dangerous substance.

09Chen: Oh:: tou fang weixian wu. fang zai shenme difang?

EP throw put dangerous thing put PR what place

Oh:: Throwing dangerous substance. Where?

10Li: fang zai you li.

put PR oil PR

In the oil.

11Chen: Em↑

12Li: jiu-shi ba na-ge du, fang zai you li=

that-is BA that-CL poison put PR oil PR

I put the poison in the oil=

13Chen: =Oh:: fang zai you li. gan shenme Ne?

Oh:: put PR oil PR do what SFP

=Oh:: In the oil. What for?

(0.3)

- 14Chen: Em↑
- 15Li: rang tamen chi.
let they eat
Let them eat.
- 16Chen: Ah↑
- 17Li: rang tamen chi.
let they eat
Let them eat.
- 18Chen: rang shui chi Ah?
let who eat SFP
Let whom eat?
- 19Li: gongren.
worker
Workers.
- 20Chen: gongren Ah↑ ni shi zuo shenme de?
worker SFP you be do what NOM
Workers↑ What did you do?
- 21Li: zai gong-di shang.
PR construction-site PR
On the construction site.
- 22Chen: Oh:: na ni weishenme yao zhe-yang zuo Ne?
Oh:: then you why want in-this-way do SFP
Oh:: Then why did you do this?
- ...(9 turns omitted here)
- 23Li: (.) zhi shi xiang rang tamen laduzi =
just be want let they diarrhea
(.) I just wanted them to have diarrhea=
- 24Chen: =zhi shi rang tamen laduzi, ni ang de shenme yao?
just be let they diarrhea you put NOM what medicine
= You just wanted them to have diarrhea. What medicine did you put?
- 25Li: (.) duyao.
poison
(.) Poison.
- 26Chen: Yoh↑ na ni ye zhen-shi-de: na chi si ren zenmeban La↑
EP then you also true-be-NOM then eat die people how SFP
Yoh↑ Then you are really:: What if people died↑
- 27 houguo dou bu xiang Ah
consequence all N-think SFP
Haven't you considered consequences?
- (0.3)
- 28Chen: Em. na ni jintian lai:: liang-ge-yue-le,
Em then you today come two-CL-month-PERF

- Em. Then you have been here for two months till today.
- 29 liang-ge yue dao zheli, shi-ba?
two-CL month arrive here be-SFP
You have been here for two months, right?
- 30 ni jintian dao zheli lai zixun, zhuyao shi shenme wenti Ne?
you today arrive here come counseling main be what problem SFP
You came here today for counseling. What are your main problems?

After enquiring into the client's name and place of birth, the police counselor moves to the inmate client's criminal history by raising a series of questions, including (1) what crime the client committed (lines 5 and 7); (2) how (lines 9, 11, 18 and 24) and why (lines 13, 14 and 22) the client committed the crime; and (3) whether the client has considered the consequences (lines 26 and 27). During the back-and-forth interaction, the police counselor's responses to the client's answers are very simple: prefacing the next question with either news receipt token "Oh" or repetition of the inmate client's answers (lines 9, 13, 20, 22 and 24). When the inmate client's answers are not clear or satisfactory, the police counselor, rather than using repetition or a complete sentence to pursue the questions, simply utters tokens such as rising "Em" (lines 11 and 14) and "Ah" (lines 7 and 16), which not only indicates the police counselor's insistence on previous topics but also displays his power by using the least words to enforce explicitness. The police counselor is cautious about making his questions less demanding and confrontational by using SPFs such as "Ne" (lines 3, 13 and 22), "La" (line 5) and "Ah" (line 18) at the end of his utterances. However, step-by-step simple and concise questions centering on the client's criminal history constructs the counselor more as a police officer conducting an interrogation.

The exclamative particle "Yoh" (line 26) is usually used in Chinese to express surprise, irony or discontent, and the adjective in the incomplete sentence "you are really" (na ni ye zhen-shi-de, line 26) is always absent when people want to express their dissatisfaction but refuse or are unwilling to speak it out directly. The adjectives absent in this sentence could be foolish, excessive, or unfortunate, etc. Unlike other SPFs in this extract, sentence-final particles "La" (line 26) and "Ah" (line 27) in these two rhetorical questions in this context emphasize the counselor's surprise at and dissatisfaction with the client's inability to think about the consequences of his criminal act. In this context, the rising Yoh, along with the absence of the adjective in utterance in line 26 and SPFs La and Ah signal the counselor's negative evaluation of the client.

The client is unwilling or hesitant to talk about his crime in detail, as proved by answers that are as simple and vague as possible (e.g. lines 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25) and his refusal to claim the floor when there are 3-second silences after the counselor's utterances (e.g. lines 13 and 27). The inmate client resorts to the terminology "throwing dangerous substance" (tou fang weixian wupin, lines 6 and 8) in reply to the police counselor's question about his crime type. This terminology is not commonly known to the general public and the counselor as well. The counselor expresses his doubts by uttering a rising Ah, indicating that he hasn't followed the flow of the inmate client's speech. In line 8, the inmate client repeats his answer verbatim without providing more information to clarify this terminology, implicating his resistance to this question. The lexical choice of the adverb "just" (zhishi) in line 23 signals the inmate client's intention to reduce the severity of his poisoning behavior.

In this extract, it is apparent that the police counselor is maintaining the control over the topic of the inmate client's criminal history. He is interrogating and blaming the inmate client for the crime he has committed. Through vague answers and silences, the inmate client explicitly shows his compliance, but opaquely resists and mitigates his responsibility for his crime. Punishing the criminals without addressing their root causes of crime is considered of little or no value and "counseling is the only way in which the root mental cause can be dealt with adequately" (See, 2004: 15). It is with this idea in mind that some counselors ask about the reasons why the inmate clients committed crime at the beginning of counseling. They might believe that all the problems inmate clients have could be traced back to their criminal history and hope that the inmate clients could learn lessons from his past. However, the problems that drive the inmate clients to the counseling are not necessarily related to their criminal history.

6. One-way Lecturing or Two-way Interaction

In the context of prisons, prison officials and inmates are in a controlling and controlled relationship. The counselors in police uniforms try to construct prison counseling as different by claiming that they attach importance to the inmate clients' voluntary wish, equality, confidentiality, and the ability to self-help. Discursive

devices such as restriction reformulation, extreme case formulations, membership categorization and shift of footing are deployed to validate their description. However, it is worth noting that the inmate clients' right to equality is understated and their right to confidentiality is overstated. Masters (2004) think that "first contact is not an interrogation or fact-finding interview" (p. 34) and the offender should be included throughout the counseling. In the opening stage of prison counseling sessions, the speaking floor is seldom handed over to the inmate clients except in enquiries into whether the inmate clients come voluntarily (e.g. extracts 1 and 2) and could treat themselves as equal to the police counselors (e.g. extract 5). No feedback of whether the inmate clients understand their rights is elicited. In addition, sequences of enquiry into the inmate clients' criminal history (e.g. extract 7) signal the police counselors' value-laden evaluation, leading to the inmate client's implicit resistance. Except extracts 1 and 2 in which the inmate clients actively provide and confirm their voluntary wish to the counseling, the inmate clients' contribution of discourse is little. None of them enquires into or confirms the rights claimed by the police counselors. Since all the counseling sessions under study are of voluntary nature, the inmate clients' coming into the counseling rooms has projected their cooperative stance. They might make the preparations that what they say will be disclosed and consider the police counselors' construction of prison counseling as an activity of lecture giving needing their little involvement. Thereby, the opening of prison counseling is jointly accomplished with the inmate clients waiting for and the police counselors rushing through the items on their agenda.

"M(m)ost counseling models are developed on the basis of research with a nonoffender population, and they may not address the specific concerns of correctional counseling" (Sun, 2008: ix). In the context of prison counseling, police counselors are in a dilemma of acting both as prison officials to control inmates and as counselors to facilitate and empower inmate clients, which is embodied in their description of inmate clients' rights in an explicit way but limiting and depriving the inmate clients of their rights in an implicit way. This paper proposes that rather than requiring the police counselors to declare inmate clients' entitlement to rights that are not feasible and hard to be realized (e.g. right to equality), prison counseling could be improved by providing limited confidentiality and avoiding topics of criminal history except in cases that the inmate clients bring them forward. If police counselors intend to elicit feedback that is not formulaic or standard, tag questions that project desired response should be changed to open questions. Furthermore, inmate clients should not be taken for granted to be beneficiaries of prison counseling services. How to indigenize counseling theories and technologies that were originated from the west and were not applied to people convicted of offences until the late 20th century in order to suit the context of China's prisons is a topic that needs further research.

The provision of prison counseling services in China's prisons is definitely a big step forward and has provided inmates a site in which they could share and speak up. Through detailed analysis of the interaction between the police counselors and inmate clients, what the police counselors ignore or are unaware of either intentionally or unintentionally could be revealed, and "k(K)nowing how these processes work is an important step in any intervention" (Potter & Wiggins, 2007: 85).

Notes:

1. This paper is part of the work entitled "Recidivism Risk Assessment and Control of Offenders in Community Correction" funded by 2012 Zhejiang Provincial Projects of Philosophy and Social Sciences (12JCFX02YB).

2. *Jian-qu*, *sub-jian-qu*, *da-dui*, *zhong-dui*

The prison in China is usually divided into different *jian-qu* (similar to unit or wing in America) for better management and in some prisons *jian-qu* might be sub-divided into *sub-jian-qu*. The terms *da-dui* (equivalent to *jian-qu*) and *zhong-dui* (equivalent to *sub-jian-qu*) now only appear in oral talk and are not officially used any more.

Appendix I: Transcription symbols

- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a pause of no more than one-tenth of a second.
- (0.3) The number in brackets indicates a pause in seconds.
- :: Colons indicate the preceding sound is prolonged.
- = The equal sign indicates no gap between the two lines.
- // Double slashes indicate one's talk is overlapped by the other's.
- ↑ Upward arrow indicates rising intonation.

Appendix II: Abbreviation symbols

BA	BA structure
CL	classifier
EP	exclamative particle
GEN	genitive (de)
N	negation marker
NOM	nominative (de)
-PERF	perfective
PR	preposition
PSV	syntactic passive marker
QM	question marker
RVC	resultative verb compliment
SFP	sentence-final particle
SP	superlative

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Note: This paper is partial result of research project "Offender Counseling Discourse Study" funded by Humanity and Social Science Youth foundation of Ministry of Education (No. 13YJC820029).



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