

# The Past, Present, and Future of Career Counseling in Taiwan

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The development of career counseling in Taiwan during the last 40 years suggests priorities for future development. Although many of the basic constructs of career counseling are used in Taiwan, cultural differences are also apparent. At the earliest stage of career development in Taiwan (1960–1980), career guidance was managed through vocational centers and government agencies. The focus was almost exclusively on school-aged youth seeking employment. At the middle stage (1980–1990), the terms for career counseling were being translated into Chinese, and trained Career Counselors were returning from study abroad. The emphasis was primarily on educational systems. At the present stage (1990–present), career counseling was provided to adults outside the school setting and corporations were organizing their own career counseling services. The future presents many conflicts between Western and Asian values, traditional or modern demands, and self or family interests. Technological advances in testing and information sciences provide opportunities and problems for career counselors.

Individuals cannot be separated from their society and the cultural context in which they were born. The self is defined in a relationship of interacting activities and roles that make up each social context. This is especially true in Chinese cultures. In the long process of socialization, the pressure of social changes will naturally influence individuals, as indicated by the major career guidance theories (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Vondracek, 1992). Parsons (1909) indicated a third step in vocational guidance in which true reasoning is emphasized for matching the situation of an individual with the world of work. Holland's (1985) congruence concept emphasized the person–environment fit matching work satisfaction, job retention, and achievement. In applying these major theories to Taiwan, the counselor needs to be especially aware of the social and cultural context. Discussions of career counseling development in Taiwan describe how changes in the economic, social, and historical context influenced the people of Taiwan to grow and make their own life plan.

The birth and subsequent development of career counseling in the United States has occurred over the last 100 years during times of major societal change (J. M. Brewer, 1942). Taiwan has also experienced rapid social change, especially in the last 40 years. Taiwan's situation, however, has never been compared with the 6-stage development of career counseling in the United States (Pope, 2000). One difficulty of comparison is the short time period of development from 1960 in Taiwan compared with the longer development of career counseling from 1890 to the present in the U.S. Until now, Taiwan has had no official career guidance association

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nor a published career counseling journal. Nonetheless, career counseling is important in Taiwan. Although Taiwan is an island of 384,000 square miles (about the size of Holland), with a population of 21,979,444 in 1999, Taiwan was ranked as the 15th most productive trade economy in the world (World Trade Organization, 2000) with the third largest foreign exchange reserves (Taiwan Government, 2000).

Industrial development is the key to economic construction, and commerce is the mainstay of economic activities in Taiwan today. According to the recent available data (Taiwan Government, 1996), the number of persons employed full-time in agriculture is down to 10% of the total workforce as part of a gradual decline in that area, while careers in manufacturing have increased and careers in service industries have also increased. By the year 1997, the per capita annual income for Taiwan was over \$15,000 U.S., and exports were over \$1,000 billion U.S. (Wen, 1998).

Under these conditions, the traditional ways of managing businesses in Taiwan have had to change. Taiwan is facing the challenges of labor shortage, high labor costs, high land costs, and demands to protect the environment. K. S. Yang (1990) emphasized that the major trends of the twenty-first century in Taiwan would first be a rapid increase in social and economic change. According to this trend, the future Taiwanese society will be more information-oriented; the service industry will become stronger; the average age of people will be higher; families will have more wealth, with more emphasis on humanitarian issues in the culture and more demand for an educational revolution.

Because the manufacturing and services sectors are frequently combined in Taiwan, the economy has already become highly diversified. This diversification across traditional boundaries has caused many social changes, but the most important social change is that people's values are changing regarding work. People believe that they not only have to make a living, but also to "make a life." The Taiwanese used to work hard to prevent hunger, and now they work hard to buy more expensive diet foods that promote hunger.

## The Beginnings of Career Development in Taiwan (1960–1980)

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In the late 1950s, the private sector developed employment offices through which people could find jobs. Because some applicants were treated unfairly, the government set up the first vocational center in Taipei in 1956 to regulate the employment agencies. The purpose of the vocational center was to help people find jobs and help employers find qualified employees. This initial center developed into 7 vocational centers and 38 vocational service stations to organize a vocational services network in Taiwan. In 1982, an Employment and Vocational Training Administration of the government was set up under the Ministry of the Interior (Lin, Tien, Chang, & Chang, 1997). The National Youth Commission was established in 1966 to offer vocational services such as helping applicants network with employers, providing vocational guidance, and facilitating relationships between employers and employees. The Youth Commission was directed to focus especially on college or university graduates from higher educational institutions in Taiwan and abroad. Through

these agencies the government traditionally plays a major role in guiding the labor market toward responsible economic growth and the creation of a stable society.

In 1968, compulsory schooling was increased from 6 to 9 years. A special committee was formed for the 9th year graduates to meet the supply and demands of the labor force in 1971. The committee required graduates to complete a survey to indicate whether they wanted a job or further education. The 9th-graders who wanted a job would visit potential employers, take a factory tour, and were then hired. Most of these graduates were about 15 years old. Research demonstrated that the turnover rate was about 40% after placement (Fang, 1987). This traditional approach to career placement was not entirely satisfactory.

## The New Concept of Career Development (1980–1990)

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The word *career* began to become popular in Taiwan about 1980. The two most common definitions were Chinese characters meaning “life development” or “life assessment.” The Chinese characters for life development are compared to the grass that grows out of the ground by the water’s edge. The *edge of the water* means the border or limitation of something just as lifelong development implies the boundary between birth and death. The Chinese characters for *life assessment* mean to calculate carefully, just as *life accounting* means checking on how individuals can spend the day, or even how they can spend their lives.

The Westernized concept of seeing life span as emphasizing change, planning, and individual differences fits with the modern opportunities of rapid economic growth and social change in Taiwan. The first three scholars in Taiwan to define the term *career* were all educated in the U.S. and then taught in the university or worked for the government. Lin (1987) defined career as what a person is doing throughout his or her life tasks and roles, while also being involved in other non-job-related activities. Jin (1987) defined career in three points: (a) a nonstop process; (b) individual experiences at family, school, and society that relate to work; and (c) the experiences that build up a unique life-style. C. S. Yang (1989) defined career as a person’s important position and role in that person’s preoccupational, occupational, as well as postoccupational life.

There is a considerable similarity across cultures in the contemporary definitions of career. McDaniels (1978) defined career as not only a person’s work or occupation but also lifestyle, including both work and leisure activities. Gysbers and Moore (1975) proposed the term *life-career development* rather than just career, including self-development, role situations, and events generally. Raynor and Entin’s (1982) definition of career has a double meaning, including both what persons are doing and thinking. Each person’s past successes and failures give that person a career perspective, an awareness of traits or abilities, and a plan for the future to help him or her gain a position in society.

In the schools, vocational guidance has now become career guidance, and student manuals have been designed with more interesting pictures and words that introduce the career concept into the normal educational process (Jin, 1991). The first textbook on the theory and practice of

career guidance was published by Lin (1987). In the education system, career guidance emphasized self-awareness, knowing the world of work, establishing self-information systems, managing time effectively, improving social skills, applying career information systems, developing career plans, and implementing a career plan (Cheng, 1998). Educators applied these career education methods through activities that explored careers; included interest and aptitude tests, explored alternative career paths; and provided individual counseling, career group activities, and career guidance workshops.

## Contemporary Career Programs in Organization (1990–Present)

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According to manpower needs in Taiwan, and most academic research, career counseling has emphasized the school context. The focus and strategy of career counseling is, therefore, most directly applied to the university, high school, intermediate school, or even the elementary school and focuses on vocational choice, manpower demands, or job adjustment (Hsu & Yang, 1993; Jin, 1991; Lin, 1993). These career planning courses, concepts of career activities, and career development handbooks have not been completely effective in guiding the students. The evaluation of career counseling and its relationship to community needs in a rapidly changing context has raised criticisms. More requests for help on employee adjustment problems, quality of life, midcareer changes, leisure activities, dual career planning, and increased numbers of elderly in the workforce indicate that counselors need to become involved with adult and employee career development outside the school setting (Huang, 1993; Jo, 1993; Ku, 1990).

The corporate employer emphasized career management and established career centers to enhance human resources (H. F. Chang & Chang, 1995). Career programs are now available in several large domestic companies such as the Taiwan Power Company; the Chinese Petroleum Development Corporation; the China Steel Corporation; and the Chung Hwa Telecom Ltd., which even has an Employee Assistance Program (China Youth Corps, 1995). Also among these programs are new employee orientation training, individual career guidance, psychological testing, and other similar services. The results of these programs have not yet, however, been evaluated.

Large international companies, like Texas Instruments, IBM, and Hewlett-Packard, have independent career development plans that are designed by their home offices and used in Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. The career development concept in these companies is related to developing effective management. Companies, therefore, focus on (a) increasing job satisfaction and feelings of achievement; (b) giving up the single-track career planning model and moving toward a multichoice model; (c) lifelong learning and on-the-job training to determine promotion and employee placement decisions; (d) providing assistance to women and parents with children and marriage and family counseling; and (e) emphasizing leisure management issues as they relate to careers. The career programs developed by multinational corporations have a strong Western bias.

## Major Conflicts in Applications of Career Guidance

Client-centered theories are not central to most career guidance theories. Most counselors in Taiwan will see, however, the desired outcome to be increased freedom for the client to participate in the counseling process. Traditional values, however, are directing the goals of higher education. The availability of white-collar jobs still encourages parents to push the younger generation. Super (1963) positioned self-concept as the core of his developmental theory. This might not be appropriately applied in Taiwan. The Eastern point of view about self emphasizes relationships with others in contrast with the more individuated Western way (M. B. Brewer, 1991; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). This difference produces many conflicts between the individual self and the family or social self. The individuated self will destroy the harmony on which a young student or a midcareer professional in Taiwan depends. Such conflict would be a good issue for the counselor and client to confront in counseling. Meanwhile, Holland's (1981) self-identity theory and Krumboltz's (1979) self-observed generalization would both also challenge the self-concept of an Eastern worldview.

Psychological tests that are based on trait theories are one of the tools that have been used in career guidance in Taiwan. Originally, some of the U.S. instruments were informally translated from English without validation, or local norms, or both. Since 1994, some authorized tests have been validated and norms identified for Taiwan (Ko, Lin, & Chang, 1994). Taiwanese people feel comfortable and look forward to seeing the results of their tests. Tests are assumed to be concrete and specific for helping a person to search for answers. The people in Taiwan take hundreds of tests as they grow up. Ancient Chinese people were previously classified by test results and have followed the careers indicated by those tests for 2 thousand years. Tests such as the Self-Directed Search (SDS; Holland & Rayman, 1986) will give a list of occupations or courses that are most functional for clients. Taking tests can be compared to going to see a doctor to seek expert advice rather than simply letting the body cure itself. A troublesome issue here is for the professional to produce more appropriate tests while, at the same time, making the client feel more satisfied after he or she has received career counseling.

Development of test norms in Taiwan is difficult to accomplish unless assistance is provided by the government. Testing resources, funding, and staff are provided by the government. Tests sponsored by the government, such as What I Like To Do for high school students (Huang & Lin, 1993) or The Interest Test (Jin, Lin, Chen, & Ou, 1994) for university students, are good samples of tools that have been developed locally over a long period of time, at great expense. Other career inventories are difficult to find, due to the small testing market in Taiwan compared with the U.S. and the huge investment required for creating, editing, validating, and publishing tests. Test development should be encouraged and coordinated with the needs of individuals, the community, and the corporation.

Computer assisted programs of career planning, such as SIGI and DISCOVER, have been used in Western countries for more than 30 years. The testing community in Taiwan has discussed whether Taiwan tests should also be computerized (Ho, 1990). There is a need to confront

the problems of test security, overexposure of the test, and testing conditions, such as item display as well as other factors that need further study (Ho, Lin, Huang, & Su, 1997). Self-directed computerized tests have a very high potential in Taiwan, and it is likely that tests will be computerized in the future. In the twenty-first century the traditional paper-and-pen tests will be moved to the computer and the Internet. This is the future direction that career development will likely be moving (Lin & Chang, 1997).

Taiwan has been going through a financial crisis. The CEO of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company said that life is unpredictable. He also indicated that many individuals discuss career planning but that he believed it is not taken seriously by human resources people (C. M. Chang, 1999). The chairman of another information technology company, Robert Tsao (1999), was reported in the *China Times* newspaper as saying, "Life should follow environmental changes. There is no way to plan. People should drift like the water and let fate bring enormous surprises" (p. 2).

It seems that these complicated social changes and the uncontrolled financial situation in Asia make it hard for people to identify their own goals and values. There are unpredictable factors that make people indecisive in developing their own career plans. There are many blind areas in career counseling. Counselors have to deal with what they already know when facing the complicated and dynamic social structure of the future.

The challenge of planning for change is advocated not only by university professors but also by the new occupational world and job values. In the last 3 years, the merging of corporations, the downsizing of companies, and the migration of manufacturing to labor-intensive countries have all resulted in many people unwillingly losing their jobs. Outplacement counseling has been popular in the Western world, and career guidance professionals need to increase their knowledge of information about this aspect of work in the rapidly changing context of the twenty-first century. The more balanced our approach to the world of work across cultures and societies, the better it will be for the counseling profession and for various societies, whether in Western or Asian countries.

## Conclusion

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The rapidly changing social context in Taiwan has resulted in increased opportunities and problems, especially regarding the conflict between China and Taiwan. Only after Taiwan has established a professional vocational guidance organization, filled the educational systems with career concepts, and developed a group of well-trained counselors, will the multinational corporations and the employees themselves have access to information about each individual's abilities, interests, and personality. The fundamental question of how this will influence the work environment is still unanswered, and the feelings of uncertainty are more powerful than the reassurance of conventional career assumptions and theoretical models. This reflection on career counseling in Taiwan is only a starting point for counselors to think about what is really needed for the people on the island of Taiwan.

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