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Dialectics of wellness: philosophical practice in Chinese contexts

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This study delves into the potential of philosophical practice to enhance individual well-being within the Chinese cultural context. It begins with an exploration of the foundational components and methodologies of philosophical practice, illuminating its dialogic nature, problem-solving orientation, and focus on self-development. A comparative analysis between philosophical practice and psychological counseling is offered, indicating the former's uniqueness in fostering equal-footing client-practitioner relationships and empowering individuals through questioning. Emphasizing the significance of these practices' contextual applications, the study elaborates on how philosophical practice aligns with traditional Chinese dialectic principles like holism, change, and conflict acceptance. Opportunities and challenges for expanding philosophical practice within China are presented, discussing cultural nuances like introversion and stigma around mental health services. The study concludes by highlighting the limitations and suggesting directions for future investigations, underscoring the importance of cultural responsiveness and termination protocol development. Ultimately, this examination concentrates on the promising prospect of philosophical practice serving as a practical guide towards enriched existential comprehension and adaptive coping strategies that promote overall well-being in China.

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Introduction

The realm of philosophical practice in Western society has seen substantial evolution, its role in resolving human predicaments and furthering welfare is becoming more widely acknowledged (Arnaiz, 2007; Alcott, 2017). This acknowledgement situates it on par with venerable disciplines like psychology, psychiatry, and medicine. In essence, the unique glamour of philosophical practice resides in its capacity to meld time-honored philosophical insights with individuals' actual life experiences. Thus, it paves the way for practical resolutions to specific dilemmas, the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, as well as fostering of personal maturity through dialogic exchanges and analytical thinking (Byrnes and Dunbar, 2014). Yet, despite achieving global acceptance and success, philosophical practice finds itself conspicuously sparse in China - a nation profoundly rooted in history and firmly established in philosophical traditions (Xia, 2017). This divergence raises compelling questions about the feasible expansion and implementation of philosophical practice within the Chinese cultural milieu.

To answer these questions, an excursion into the theoretical foundations of philosophical practice is undertaken. A comparative scrutiny between philosophical and psychological methods is ensuing, intending to illuminate their respective merits and drawbacks (Fassinger, 2005; Hatfield, 2002). The ultimate objective lies in highlighting the significance and indispensability of philosophical practice in catering to the wellness and philosophical necessities of individuals within modern Chinese society. By contributing towards scholarly dialogue concerning philosophical practice and championing its incorporation into mainstream ideologies for individual well-being in China, there is an unequivocal need to fortify the existing mental health support structure (Yuan, 2019; Tiwald, 2015).

Philosophical practice: foundations and approaches

Defining the terrain: unpacking philosophical practice. The spectrum of philosophical practice, which houses within its domain of philosophical counseling and therapy, first appeared on the European stage during the 1980s. The nucleus of this movement was centered around offering philosophical guidance to individuals wrestling with daily life obstacles (Ding, 2018). This emergence underpins the steadfast assertion that philosophy bears practical ramifications beyond traditional educational environments (Maggs and Robinson, 2016). In recent times, a noteworthy shift towards marrying philosophical insights with counseling and therapy strategies has been gaining momentum, superseding cultural frontiers. This trend is most evident in Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore (Cheng and Tse, 2014). A blend of idiosyncratic local values and cultural viewpoints has acted as the catalyst for the permeation of philosophical practice across these territories. By amalgamating Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and other classical Eastern philosophies with modern Western philosophical tenets, novel pathways for investigating and tackling individual quandaries from disparate outlooks have flourished (Tang et al., 2016). As an empirical indication, philosophical practices integrating Eastern traditions have shown positive impacts on personal development (Joshi, 2014). Consequently, this facilitates pluralistic paradigms for managing personal issues, fostering multiculturalism within the ambit of philosophical counseling and therapy, and consequently orchestrating more targeted solutions to global predicaments.

According to the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (2023), philosophical practice implies a suite of activities anchored in philosophy programmed to benefit societal masses. Typically, philosophers involved in this domain usher clients

towards rational judgment, cognitive enhancement, augmented wisdom, and enriched life purpose (Yu and Wei, 2019). Even more specifically, philosophical practice extends advice for netting happiness, providing non-medical or psychological treatment for emotional distress (Ding, 2013). As empirical evidence suggests, philosophical practice can support individuals to manage their anxieties and psychological stress more effectively (Michopoulou, 2022). Its primary aspiration is to heighten people's awareness of philosophy and inspire philosophical reasoning, while also devising strategies for everyday challenges. And it seeks to instill a philosophical attitude and mode of thinking in individuals, shaping their underlying thought processes (Zhu, 2015).

Researchers categorize philosophical practice into three main types: individual counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting, each distinguished by their unique objectives. Individual counseling reveals a one-on-one dialogue between practitioner and client, designed to examine internal beliefs, elucidate ideas, and resolve intellectual impasses, thereby steering self-growth. Group facilitation is anchored on the dialogic engagement of a philosophical practitioner with multiple clients facilitating critical thought processes and nurturing various group discussions (DeFehr, 2008). Lastly, organizational consulting targets larger bodies like government agencies, academic institutions, or commercial corporations, aspiring to nurture ethically driven organizations that offer a positive working environment (Marinoff, 1999; Chen, 2015; Ding, 2016). Regardless of the model, the central theme posits philosophy as an accessible, relevant and comprehensive tool for addressing tangible challenges and a broader audience. By doing so, its social applicability becomes more readily available and recognized. Aggregated empirical evidence underscores how philosophical practices have improved the problem-solving abilities of individuals and organizations across genres (Marinoff, 2022).

Tools of the trade: dialogic conversation and thought analysis in philosophical practice.

There is no doubt that philosophical practice presents a unique methodology for reconciling philosophy with real-world conundrums. The true essence of philosophical practice resides in its capacity to equip clients with practical answers to particular concerns while simultaneously honing their critical thinking abilities and augmenting their understanding. Consequently, a pertinent investigation of how philosophical practice achieves these laudable objectives is imperative. Distinctively, philosophical practice navigates these goals through two core avenues: dialogic conversation and thought analysis (Chen, 2015; Pan, 2013c; Anderson, 2007; Anderson, 2012; Alcott, 2017).

Dialogic conversation in philosophical practice involves an engaging dialogue between practitioners and clients aimed to collaboratively untangle the client's concerns. Through this process, clients acquire enhanced insights into their dilemmas and sprout new perspectives on resolving them (Salvaterra, 2023). In addition to nudging them to ponder alternative perspectives and cognitive approaches, philosophical practitioners play an essential role in designing a secure and comforting environment for clients to explore their thoughts and sentiments. And it has been proved that this engagement ensures substantial improvements in client well-being (Jacob, 2019).

Thought analysis is yet another instrumental channel wherein philosophical practitioners assist clients in identifying and dissecting the underlying postulations and beliefs that ignite their thinking (Watson et al., 2001). The process encompasses examining the logic and rationale behind the client's conceptions

and convictions, interwoven with challenging their validity. Through such meticulous navigation, clients escalate toward a profound understanding of their thought processes facilitating the formulation of more accurate and justifiable beliefs (Haşegan, 2019). A compelling example emerges from a study revolving around the dialogic conversations between philosophy students and prison inmates, which served to illustrate that philosophical practice, when based on the existentialism model, successfully applies existentialism's theory of human existence. The particularly highlighted principle offered a route for individuals to traverse from confinement toward freedom, guiding prison inmates and similarly positioned people out of life's mazes, back to hope-filled life, and fueling positive transformations (Yang, 2022).

Moreover, philosophical practice draws parallels with the midwife method employed in Socratic dialectics where practitioners engage in dialogic conversations with clients over specific issues (Chen, 2012). This conversational progression ushered through dialectical reasoning, induces clients to deliberate on their lives' challenges and the underlying significance of their existence (Hoffman, 2014). As an offshoot, clients are predisposed to lead lives filled with productivity, purpose, meaning, and joy. On another note, the entrenched value of philosophical practice can also unfurl itself through "thought analysis" inspired by analytic philosophy and logic (Pan, 2013c). In today's technologically driven society witnessing a surge in mental health concerns triggered by personal cognitive dissonance between subjective needs and existing realities, alongside communal strife born out of belief variances, philosophical guidance could steer clear of such inflictions (Pan, 2013a; 2021). Adopting logical tools embedded within analytical philosophy like reasoning, identification of hidden premises, and thought analysis helps crystalize client's understanding of their anguishes' root cause thereby enabling them to dismantle these belief conflicts gradually serving toward gaining an enriched comprehension of life (Pan, 2013b; Valentinovich, 2018).

Methodologies in philosophical practice: a triad approach.

Philosophical practice, as a discipline, is steeped in the application of philosophical ideologies and methodologies to tangible life concerns. Bonded by the conviction that philosophical thought can augment human prosperity and enliven life, it underscores the importance of dialogic conversation, deemed instrumental for efficacious problem-solving and personal progression (Lahav, 2016). This section delves into the three cardinal approaches enveloping philosophical practice: *problem-solving*, *thinking-orientation*, and *self-development*, and each echoing its core values.

The problem-solving approach enables philosophical practitioners to diagnose concerns that are crippling their clients, such as work dissatisfaction or relationship hurdles, through dialogic conversation and thought analysis. By employing the wisdom of philosophy, worthwhile solutions are crafted leading clients towards liberation from anxieties and fostering a profound lifestyle (Lahav, 2016). Intricate overlaps with cognitive therapy surface within the problem-solving approach, specifically regarding managing individual negative emotions and issues. Though both channels focus on adjusting original cognition to dispel behavioral and emotional disputes, philosophical practice proceeds a step further by steering clients to contemplate life's essence and value post-problem resolution, inciting them toward a more meaningful existence (Wang, 2000).

The second approach, thinking-orientation, plays a pivotal role in philosophical practice. Since an individual's way of thinking mirrors their worldview, this approach sheds light on erroneous

ideations prone to inconsistent or false beliefs, thereby enabling clients to cultivate critical thinking skills and analyze matters from variegated perspectives (Fisher, 1996; Ding et al., 2022a). The utilization of dialectics permits visualizing vague ideas progressively. Phenomenological reduction, another practice tool, facilitates achieving more objective perceptions by extracting subjective preconceptions (Bernet, 2016; Depraz, 1999).

Rooted in individuality, the self-development approach aspires to delve deep into the client's internal world (Lahav, 2016). Philosophical practitioners utilize philosophical knowledge and prowess to encourage clients toward profound introspection, thereby resolving existing problems while simultaneously enhancing personal traits (Chen and Xu, 2015; Yu and Wei, 2019). While there are parallels with humanistic therapy in prioritizing equal status for clients and self-realization, philosophical practice emphasizes active self-reflection with practitioner guidance. This venture enables clients to unearth their values and catalyze personal development based on advanced self-understanding, delineating it from traditional psychotherapeutic approaches (Fang, 2012).

The impact of philosophical practice on enhancing well-being **Theoretical underpinnings: harnessing philosophy for well-being enhancement.**

As previously discussed, philosophical practice emerged as an advocate for the practical application of philosophical theories and methods to ameliorate life's perplexities (Ding, 2018). Above all, it envisages deploying philosophical wisdom, such as individual attention, group dynamics and organizational culture, in diverse areas, aiding individuals and groups to rediscover values and offering ethical guidance to leaders representing a tangible application of its principles. As for the "value", the perception of it often varies across different philosophical branches, falling into categories such as intrinsic or extrinsic based on sourcing, or moral and prudential, considering the application scope (Sheldon et al., 2010; Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2015; Bradley, 2002; Campbell, 2013; Rodogno, 2016). In other words, with the help of philosophical wisdom, philosophical practice introduces moral value and caters to the discomforts of the mind so that it helps clients tackle life problems and enhance their well-being, marking itself as a resourceful tool across a broad spectrum of issues (Zhang, 2014; Harteloh and Yang, 2013; Marinoff, 2005).

An instance surfaces with nursing professionals grappling with heightened moral distress leading to burnout, anxiety, and compromised patient care. Utilizing philosophical practice, they can revisit their perspectives on distress, gain clarity about moral values operation, and understand their emotions more accurately, thereby improving patient interaction, team collaboration, and personal health (Matchett, 2019).

Besides, philosophical practice adds value by promoting accurate, defensible, action-guiding, and truth-oriented self-understanding (Jopling, 1996). By assisting clients to engage in honest self-assessment and rational pursuit of life goals, practitioners enhance philosophical insight and deepen self-understanding, leading to a wise attitude. For example, in societies that appreciate elite education and achievement strongly, philosophical practice helps individuals suffering from work burnout to rectify misconceptions about work, reforming their attitudes towards life (Monteiro et al., 2015; Bragues, 2006). It also assists workaholics with deep introspection, aiding in finding their true selves, escaping work bondage, and becoming independent individuals once again (Park, 2022; Kim, 2020).

Moreover, the cultivation of critical thought is also a vital objective of philosophical practice. Elliot D. Cohen (2005) accentuates that emotional and behavioral troubles are often

rooted in absolute and perfectionist interpretations of reality. With the aid of philosophical theories, practitioners help clients develop a clear understanding of concepts and identify optimal solutions and further foster their critical thinking skills, allowing them to steer clear of future similar dilemmas (Cohen, 2005; Ding et al., 2022b). For instance, self-deprecation can be navigated effectively using philosophical practice, uplifting personal growth, and understanding depth (Kim and Hong, 2022). Furthermore, by recognizing fear, anxiety, and death as integral elements of human existence, clients can shape meaningful lives out of otherwise meaningless beings (Feary, 2020).

Comparing philosophical practice to psychological counselling.

Present-day psychotherapy employs an array of techniques to address mental afflictions, whereby each modality is grounded upon specific assumptions and adheres to stringent operational procedures, akin to the empirical scientific methods utilized in psychiatric treatment. Nevertheless, limitations are increasingly evident in the practical application of these methodologies. Specifically, modern psychiatric and psychological therapies typically focus on comprehending mental issues from neurological and psychological perspectives, demonstrating marked efficacy in treating particular ailments yet limited by intrinsic shortcomings concerning human comprehension so that their effectiveness is constrained under certain circumstances and even sometimes fails to resolve issues. On the other hand, philosophy therapy within the medical model endeavors to rectify biases in contemporary treatment approaches utilizing philosophy's critique and reflective capacity. However, it is ultimately still bound by inherent restrictions of the medical model and fails to fully harness philosophy's potential to guide life (Raabe, 2013). Therefore, it engenders introspections from a philosophical standpoint and incites exploration of an innovative philosophy-based therapeutic paradigm, i.e. philosophical practice, aimed at supplementing the shortcomings in modern treatments.

In other words, as a rapidly emerging field, contemporary philosophical practice reaches beyond the confines of academic discourses and leverages philosophical concepts to assist individuals grappling with dilemmas regarding their beliefs and value systems, aiming to interweave philosophy into the intricate fabric of everyday life, assist individuals in navigating through their ideological impasses, reinventing their worldviews, and transforming their cognitive modalities. Hence, although not devised as a replacement for psychological counselling or therapy, philosophical practice proffers an equally competent alternative that addresses commonsensical human issues, demonstrating uniqueness in its therapeutic target, therapeutic relationship, therapeutic methodology, and therapeutic objectives. Every step in philosophical practice, from inception through process to culmination, is exploratory. Consequently, this philosophy therapy paradigm showcases enhanced openness and flexibility compared to either evidence-based psychiatric or psychological therapies or philosophy therapies predicated on the medical model. Its effectiveness surfaces both in its structural formation as well as content, including the equal partnership, power of inquiry and versatility in application (Ouyang, 2012).

Equal partnership: redefining client-practitioner interactions. Addressing differences between philosophical practice and psychological therapy, an important distinction manifests itself in the fundamental "form" adopted by each. Profiling these therapeutic disciplines broadly, psychotherapy displays a "diagnosis" approach while philosophical practice takes on a "dialogic conversation" modality. In the realm of psychological counselling and therapy, practitioners predominantly assume an

"authoritative" or "expert" role and perceive clients as patients struggling with negative emotions, maladaptive behaviors, and evident adaptational dysfunctions to daily life such as "schizophrenia" or "bipolar disorder" (Peter and Gong, 2013; Yang, 2019). Consequently, they resort to prescribing premade solutions or medications based on their professional knowledge or skills (Ouyang, 2012).

In contrast, philosophical practice highlights conflicts and confusions within clients stemming from conflicting thought processes and ideological constructs often deeply embedded within their psyche, sidestepped in traditional diagnostic practice (Peter and Gong, 2013; Chen and Luo, 2018). Far from being labelled as mentally ill, clients engaged in philosophical practice are viewed as rational individuals capable of participating in meaningful discourse (Marinoff, 1999; Ouyang, 2012).

This reciprocal, honest, and free communicative process facilitates mutual respect and understanding, fostering an egalitarian relationship between philosophical practitioners and clients (Chen, 2012; Fang, 2012). This positioning sharply contrasts the dominator-dominated, giver-receiver dynamic typically observed in psychotherapeutic settings. This very equality encourages mutual influence and development conducive to effective and enhanced philosophical practice, thereby manifesting its superiority over traditional psychological approaches.

Power of inquiry: enabling autonomy through questioning. Within the epitome of equality fostered by dialogic conversations, the questioning technique innate to philosophical practice surpasses that utilized in traditional psychological counseling by stimulating deeper introspection and fostering a more comprehensive self-understanding among clients. Predominantly underpinned by principles of humanist philosophy, which emphasize intrinsic human value and significance, philosophical practitioners help clients rediscover their unique worth and purpose. Consequently, instead of merely problem-solving, this line of inquiry delves into exploring an individual's inherent value and potential (Marinoff, 1999).

Specifically, psychotherapists often propose simpler, conversationally based questions such as "What's wrong with you," whereas philosophical practitioners further extend their inquiry to ask "What's right with you." This dialectical interplay suggests neither completely good nor bad prevails in any individual, essentially establishing that goodness and badness infiltrate each other. This method inspires dialectical thinking that embraces the notion of co-existing rights and wrongs. As such, philosophical practice equips clients to experience life more fully and happily through exploratory and insightful dialectic introspection (Ding and Marinoff, 2021).

In addition to these formal contrasts, philosophical practice also markedly challenges psychotherapy in both its core focus and ultimate aims. It means that in the process of questioning, contrary to psychotherapists who concentrate on a client's specific self-awareness and emotional development during particular stages, philosophical practitioners delve deeper into existential complexities relating to one's ways of thinking (American Philosophical Practitioners Association, 2023; McLeod, 2006). Invalid reasoning processes might engender cognitive distortions, culminating in behavioral and emotional difficulties, hence cultivating critical thinking skills through philosophical practice can be instrumental in rational decision-making and enlightened value systems acquisition (Ding et al., 2022a; LeBon, 2007).

Besides, the pursuit of "logical clarification" in philosophical practice also plays a crucial role in enhancing clients' thinking abilities. This ensures coherence in clients' internal reasoning

processes and leads to increased self-awareness, personal growth, and overall well-being (Martin, 2001; Myers, 2013; Chen and Luo, 2018). In other words, the philosophical practice could help clients clarify the logic of their abstract problems and further offer more effective resolutions for profound and contradictory problems compared to conventional psychotherapy approaches. For instance, consider the case of a high-school student struggling with depression, who, feeling a loss of purpose and motivation, contemplated dropping out. He realized that his psychological issues were deeply rooted in metaphysical aspects and extended beyond the scope of traditional psychological counseling (Yang, 2020).

Therefore, such empirical evidence suggests that questioning in philosophical practice guides individuals toward positive contemplation of problems and encourages exploration of solutions from multiple perspectives, including the metaphysical aspects and so on (Zhang et al., 2014; Sugarman, 2015; Landemore and Page, 2015; Hall et al., 2010; Gause and Coholic, 2010). And it requires the utilization of highly abstract and speculative cognitive faculties which are typically encountered in academic lectures, research, and philosophical education. In view of it, recognizing these differences is essential for individuals to choose the most suitable counseling style and effectively achieve mental health and life milestones.

Versatility in application: valuing context in philosophical practice. Unlike psychotherapy, which primarily concentrates on identifying past causality and diagnosing based on psychological theories, philosophical practice lays significant emphasis on clients' current circumstances and prospective behaviors during reciprocal communication. The aim is further than just troubleshooting—it involves stratagems for recurrence prevention and also ensures that employed solutions bear long-lasting effects (Yang, 2019).

To be more specific, psychotherapists are more inclined towards addressing past negative emotions and psychological issues through emotional regulation or medication to ensure the maintenance of a standard healthy lifestyle, while philosophical practitioners assign priority to the exploration of present behavior's meaning, purpose, value, and future impact. They stress examining rational consciousness in the client's subconscious mind, paving the way for more visionary decision-making related to needs and fostering future self-development.

Therefore, rather than extracting painful past experiences to pinpoint problem causality, philosophical practice embarks on the journey of understanding a client's current situation while galvanizing them towards deep contemplation. This process prompts clients to broaden their perspectives, obtain an enhanced comprehension of their confronted problems' quintessence, and gauge personal strengths and weaknesses. Through this innovative approach, clients can resonate with their existing behaviors' significance, thereby promoting the advent of a healthier and more enthusiastic cognitive mode leading to self-liberation, wise decision-making, and hence a fuller life.

Philosophical practitioners further assist clients in cultivating worldviews beneficial for both physical and mental health, thereby boosting their problem-solving abilities. Clients are thereby encouraged to take accountability for their lives, empowering them to produce positive alterations—this strategy effectively promotes personal growth and well-being (Chen, 2015; Wei, 2013). As a unique tool within its discipline, philosophical practice endows substantial merit to personal growth promotion and well-being by directing clients to engage in introspective thought, nurturing an optimistic worldview, and leading them toward self-liberation and ultimately a more gratifying existence. Given this, it is pertinent to bear in mind that the efficacy of

philosophical practice is highly contextual, necessitating further research to ascertain its proficiency across varying cultural contexts and diverse populations.

Universal strategies within cultural specificities: philosophical practice within the Chinese context

Drawing deeply from its robust wellspring of traditional philosophy, China offers a rich tapestry of practical wisdom. This wisdom has significantly shaped individual lives and societal ethics among the Chinese populace. Recorded dialogues between Confucius and his disciples, as captured in the *Analects*, teem with insights that address both personal and public affairs, providing rational guidance for leading a healthy life. For instance, Confucianism's stress on enduring hardships and embracing them as stepping stones towards self-improvement resonates strongly with the Western culture's emphasis on confronting problems directly rather than eradicating of negative pressures. This encourages individuals to handle psychological conflicts and stressful situations optimistically, serving as an effective technique for reducing frustration and depressive symptoms (Luo et al., 2010).

Additionally, frameworks like Taoism have wielded substantial influence over China's traditional ethical fabric. For example, it emphasizes addressing malpractices through concepts of moral perfection, care for life, and social equality. Implementing this approach through daily virtues quantification and attaching corresponding rewards or punishments, assists Chinese individuals in making value judgments about their behavior, thus improving self-control to better handle life's challenges (Yu, 2015).

As noted by British historian Joseph Needham (1961), the inherent predilection amongst Chinese for dialectical logic, which seeks middle ground and compromise amidst opposition, forms an integral part of Chinese folk wisdom. This provides a unique ideological cornerstone to approach contradictions and conflicts holistically and moderately (Peng and Nisbett, 1999; 2000; Bian and Ji, 2008; Veraksa et al., 2022). Out of this cultural text, philosophical practice has emerged as a new paradigm tackling issues related to human existence and evolution. As it guides clients to resolve ideological disputes, cultivate a more rational worldview, and attain inner serenity, it complements the Chinese individuals' psychologically ingrained rational problem-solving approach and dialectic thinking (Wang, 2014).

In the wake of global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, philosophical practitioners within China, aided by the philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, guide clients towards positive introspection during their isolation, viewing it as an opportunity to foster personal growth rather than perceiving it as an issue to be resolved. This foundationally demonstrates the utility of dialectical thinking in a practical context unique to China (Ding et al., 2022a). The underpinnings of philosophical practice are strikingly resonant with the inherent qualities of Chinese culture, making it a promising tool for enhancing understanding and fostering robust coping mechanisms among people from Chinese backgrounds. For instance, the Confucian principles of “仁” (ren), “礼” (rites), and “义” (righteousness) manifest prevalently in counseling sessions wherein philosophical practice is utilized (Wang et al., 2014). As such an orientation towards filial piety, morality and ethical rectitude pervades the fabric of society and individual identity within China, its incorporation into dialogic conversations has enabled individuals with enhanced lenses to perceive personal challenges and devise resilient coping strategies. Such is a key application of philosophical practice set within a Chinese cultural context.

Adapting to Chinese heritage: aligning philosophical practice with traditional wisdom

Holism and collectivism: foundations for philosophical practice in the Chinese context. A distinguishing feature of traditional Chinese dialectic thought is the emphasis on holism, a stark contrast to Western philosophy's focus on deconstructing elements and structures constituting entities (Chen, 2023; Chen, 2002). For instance, philosophy like "Heaven-Human Unity" or societal ideals of "Great Harmony," embody the holistic ethos at the core of Chinese philosophies (Liu, 2013). Such systems of belief have fostered collectivism within Chinese society's understanding of interpersonal and social relationships, valuing the collective whole and its interests as a prerequisite for individual existence (Zhang and Chen, 2021).

In philosophical practice, this holistic perspective and collective ethos have found embodiment within group facilitation—an approach that has been favorably received among Chinese individuals. Group sessions allowing dilemma training, compliance workshops, and other goal-based activities synchronize shared understanding and consensus on life's essence and value among participants thus facilitating collective problem-solving and mutual understanding (American Philosophical Practitioners Association, 2023; Ding, 2016).

The holistic principle further aligns with the Chinese interpretation of mind-body relationships. Occupying a central position in doctrines like Confucianism, this philosophy encourages a combined consideration of psychological, physiological, social, and environmental aspects. A trend has developed amongst Chinese individuals, supported by this psychosomatic unity belief, to interpret psychological discomfort through physical manifestations like migraine or chest tightness. This pattern necessitates a culturally adapted philosophical guidance rooted in Confucian culture to effectively address these intertwined issues (Luo et al., 2020; Cheng, 2021). An aspect warranting attention is an instance involving patients suffering severe illnesses guided through their recovery journey by philosophical practice that incorporates core concepts of Taoist philosophy (Chan et al., 2006). This approach encouraged understanding oneself and the environment, reflecting the Taoist philosophy of conforming with nature's flow and introspection—an embodiment of a dialectical thought process. The observed flexibility and adaptability echoed the nature of philosophical practice while showcasing a considerable potential for catering to the Chinese population's unique demands and priorities.

Beyond the purview of knowledge acquisition and critical thinking, philosophical practice facilitates emotional resilience—a trait that aligns notably with the Yin Yang harmony fundamental to Taoism and the Stoic tenets pivotal to Buddhism. The significance of this integration should not be understated when considering how philosophical practice can aid individuals hailing from Chinese backgrounds in effectively navigating their personal and societal experiences (Chan, 2004; Wong, 2015). Simultaneously, striving for He, or harmony, promotes a balance between personal aspirations and societal needs for internal peace. In parallel, the concept of Dao helps guide clients in identifying their life path and purpose (Joshnloo, 2014; Ip, 2014; Vos, 2018). The integration of these concepts contributes uniquely to Chinese philosophical practice by assisting clients in developing a deeper understanding of themselves, and their surroundings, and in achieving mental tranquility, thereby furthering societal well-being as a whole.

Acceptance of flux and contradictions: insights from Chinese philosophical practice. Recognized as a crucial tenet of traditional Chinese dialectic thought, the principle of change illustrates that the universe is in continuous flux where every aspect can

transform into its opposite (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). Therefore, this tacit acceptance of fluctuation guides Chinese individuals to embrace flexible rather than fixed concepts of reality and willingly reconcile differences between hoped-for outcomes and actual results (Spencer-Rodgers and Peng, 2004). Therein, an inherent contradiction of tolerance emerges amongst the Chinese populace, who perceive these contrasting phenomena as natural, inescapable attributes of existence, leading to a preference for moderation or compromise. Consequently, Chinese individuals tend to introspective adjustments during event changes, understanding themselves better and thereby fostering personal development. This aspect makes philosophical practice, especially those centered around stimulating deep-seated philosophical contemplations, particularly effective with Chinese participants (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the principle of contradiction, an essential facet of dialectical thinking, dictates that all aspects of the world undergo continual transformation, suggesting the perpetual coexistence of contradictions. Instead of polarizing these oppositions, such as Western perspectives might, Chinese people endeavor to retain basic elements of opposing views, enabling them to acknowledge both their strengths and weaknesses simultaneously (Peng and Nisbett, 1999; Zhang et al., 2015; Williams and Aaker, 2002). Applying this principle within philosophical practice prompts clients to engage in dialectical introspection, thus accepting and handling contrasts they confront.

Moreover, the Yin-Yang model of contradictory thinking has extensively molded Chinese psychology, fostering vigilance in peaceful times while promoting optimism amidst adversity (Jiang, 2013). Therefore, Chinese clients engaged in philosophical practice have an innate tendency to dissect their life's contradictory problems and construct optimistic worldviews leading to rational decision-making, rather than focusing solely on negative emotions or actions, thus aligning well with the principle of contradiction and Yin-Yang theory.

The integration of dialectical thinking within this context necessitates understanding essential concepts and principles such as situational evaluation, coexistence, complementarity, and moderation (Lomas and Ivtzan, 2016; Yaden et al., 2017). Collectively, these principles foster an objective problem perception by overcoming inherent biases, nurturing inner peace by appreciating emotional diversity, and endorsing comprehensive assessments through inclusive view examination (Ng and Chen, 2022; Chen et al., 2013; Drob, 2003; Lambert et al., 2020). Consequently, these principles offer guided clarity in effectively engaging philosophical practices that adhere to the Chinese cultural context.

However, it would be remiss to not underscore the challenges faced due to mental health stigma persisting in China—an issue which, although poses a barrier to the wider acceptance of philosophical practice, also creates an arena where the flexible framework of philosophical practice can shine (Yang et al., 2007; Duan, 2018). By positioning dialogic sessions as platforms for intellectual exploration rather than remedial tools for psychological issues, it provides a culturally sensitive alternative that could potentially improve overall well-being by making help-seeking behaviors more acceptable and accessible.

Prospects and barriers in the Chinese landscape for expanding philosophical practice. Since dialectical thinking is the essence of traditional Chinese philosophy with profound influence, its principles of holism, change, and contradiction can provide a good ideological foundation for the application and development of Chinese philosophical practice. For instance, the principle of

holism can promote Chinese people to actively participate in group facilitation, which contains the characteristics of collectivism, and the principle of change and contradiction can guide Chinese people to more rationally understand and deal with ideological problems and conflicts in the process of philosophical practice, leading to a more intelligent life. Thus, from the perspective of dialectical thinking, the application and development of philosophical practice in China has a promising future, and it is bound to be a better way to guide the Chinese people in their daily lives and solve their problems and perplexities. In the cultural context of China, the dialectical cognitive style encourages individuals to view problems from a more macro and holistic perspective, while emphasizing individual and situational factors. Dialectical thinking prompts individuals to adopt a broader range of coping strategies and distinguish and respond to situational demands in different situations. For example, when faced with an uncontrollable situation, people try to change their own thoughts or emotional experiences rather than attempting to change the objective situation (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010). Philosophical practice's reflective and dialogical nature helps Chinese people better cope with life's difficulties and setbacks, encouraging individuals to avoid extreme tendencies in their beliefs, cognition, emotions, and behavior, as well as simplistic binary thinking. Individuals not only improve their psychological resilience through methods such as emotional regulation and increased exercise but also actively seek social support to create a warm and positive social environment for themselves.

Despite its opportunities, philosophical practice is still a field that lacks broad attention in China and there are some challenges for expanding the philosophical practice. For example, in addition to dialectical thinking, the Chinese are also deeply influenced by the culture of introversion (Ma, 2005; Boucher, 2005; Xiong, 2009). In other words, compared with Western people, Chinese people are more likely to have the personality traits of introversion. In this case, when they encounter psychological confusion or internal conflicts, most of them are often used to repressing it inside, rather than choosing the way to talk actively (Zhang and Yan, 2012). Therefore, as for Chinese philosophical practitioners, they need to seize the opportunity in the dialogue with clients, actively inspire clients to think and communicate, and strive to generalize it to the other life events of the clients, to achieve the effect of philosophical practice, solving the confusion of their inner hearts and enhancing the well-being of themselves. What's more, some people in China may not be fully aware of the different forms of counseling and therapy available, including philosophical practice, so the one who seeks help for mental or emotional issues may be perceived as an abnormal person, doing harm to his social image and reputation and leading to social embarrassment or shame (Zhang et al., 2020). Hence, it means that there may still be a stigma associated with seeking help for mental and emotional well-being in Chinese society. This stigma may discourage individuals from seeking philosophical practice, and it is also a challenge to expand philosophical practice in China.

Discussion

Drawing upon the fundamental tenets and contextual applications of philosophical practice, this study embarked on a journey to elucidate its role in enhancing individual well-being within the Chinese cultural context. As we navigate through the crossroads of abstract philosophy and everyday human experiences, distinctive elements of philosophical practice come to light. By embracing the tools of dialogic conversation and critical thinking, it extends beyond the traditional psychological counseling paradigm, promising a pathway toward deeper self-development. This

exploration lays bare the potential that philosophical practice holds for fostering enriched understanding and adaptive coping strategies, especially in culturally nuanced circumstances such as China.

However, embracing its promise invites a deeper examination of inherent challenges and future perspectives. The spectrum of these considerations encompasses developing clear termination guidelines, acknowledging the influence of various cultural factors, and recognizing the significance of intercultural competence. Inclusive of these complexities, our discussion presents an integrated view of how philosophical practice can authentically function as a mechanism to address unique societal needs and enhance overall well-being within the diverse demographic and cultural landscape of China.

Uniting philosophical practice and well-being in China.

Embracing an expansive role for philosophy encompassing both the intellectual pursuit of truth and a guide to meaningful living, Western philosophical practitioners have placed philosophical practice at the intersection of abstract concepts and human experiences (Ding and Yu, 2020). This dialogic approach materializes most effectively through client-practitioner conversations and thought analysis, intricately woven into daily occurrences. The unique aspect of this approach lies in the cultivation of critical thinking skills, markedly distinguishing it from traditional psychological counseling and therapy. In the quest for self-improvement, philosophical practitioners engage clients deeply, nurturing their cognitive abilities and developing problem-solving strategies. This process assumes significant importance in Chinese cultural contexts where the propensity for dialectical reasoning forms the cornerstone of challenge management and adaptive coping mechanisms. Accordingly, philosophical practice possesses substantial potential for individuals seeking to enrich their understanding, enhance coping abilities, and pursue fulfilling lives within Chinese society.

Termination guidelines: enhancing pragmatism and cultural sensitivity in Philosophical practice.

Even as the recognition of philosophical practice grows, the area of termination protocols warrants attention (Yu, 1999). Abrupt or indefinite engagements can lead to the loss of acquired knowledge or create unhealthy practitioner dependencies. Current practices lean on tools like the Termination Behavior Checklist to assess suitable closure timings (Quintana and Holahan, 1992; Hu et al., 2020). Replicating this strategy, however, requires contextual considerations to match the fabric of Chinese society, thereby improving efficacy while respecting local sensibilities. Future research could thus focus on providing robust, tailor-made theoretical benchmarks to aid precise termination decisions.

Fostering global dialogue through intercultural competence.

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering cultural sensitivity becomes paramount for philosophical practitioners. Their practice should respect cultural diversity and steer clear of superimposing personal philosophical biases on clients. As such, elevating intercultural competence — a thorough understanding of global cultures, beliefs, and traditions—is indispensable. This skill set enables practitioners to establish effective relationships with clients across diverse cultural spectrums (Chen et al., 2018).

This study underscores the potential of philosophical practice in enhancing individuals' well-being within China's cultural realms. The adaptability, versatility, and cultural consonance of philosophical practice signify a promising path to meet the unique needs of various individuals residing within China's vast demographics. Nevertheless, while significant insights have been

gleaned on bridging philosophical practice with Chinese traditional principles, few limitations have emerged that warrant future exploration efforts. Foremost among them is the comprehensive implementation of philosophical practice across the regional and individual variances within heterogeneous China (Wu, 2023). Similarly, the study mainly reflects practitioners' perspectives, leaving unaddressed the views and experiences of clients engaged in philosophical practice. While certain assumptions about the Chinese context, particularly regarding introversion and mental health stigma, are made based on secondary sources, firsthand data in the forms of interviews or surveys could provide more valuable insights and corroborate these conjectures (Tang and Bie, 2016).

The study also identifies a gap concerning termination guidelines in philosophical practice. While acknowledging this void, the necessary expansion toward defining culturally aligned termination criteria has not been discussed. Future investigations could thus aim to create tailor-made protocols paralleling tools like the Termination Behavior Checklist (Quintana and Holahan, 1992). Moreover, the focus on dialectical thinking might unintentionally exclude vital cultural considerations affecting the acceptance of philosophical practice, such as family ideologies, religious beliefs, or social hierarchies. A broader examination encompassing these elements could facilitate a well-rounded understanding of cultural influences on philosophical practice. It is also worth exploring the effects of philosophical practice on discrete demographics like adolescents, the elderly, and professionals dealing with burnout. By understanding the unique needs of these specific subsets, tailored philosophic practices can potentially raise their efficacy within China's multifaceted cultural fabric.

Conclusion

This study embarked on the exploration of philosophical practice as a catalyst for enhancing well-being in China, shedding light on its distinct potential to resonate deeply with Chinese culture and society. Notably, through dialogic conversation and critical thinking, philosophical practice presents a distinctive path toward self-improvement that surpasses the scope of traditional psychological counseling, positioning itself uniquely at the interface of abstract ideas and human experiences.

However, with promise comes challenges and areas for future development. As we embrace this potential, it becomes apparent that attention must be accorded to specific aspects such as the establishment of clear termination guidelines and acknowledgement of cultural considerations intricate to Chinese society, while not forgetting the importance of fostering strong intercultural competence for effectively addressing unique societal needs and improving overall well-being.

In line with the topic and underpinning our work's focal point—enhancing well-being in China—the adaptability, versatility, and cultural consonance of philosophical practice present themselves as compelling tools. They signify a potent means to understand and address the diverse and unique needs within China's expansive demographic landscape. However, it's noteworthy that broadening the arena of inquiry around topics like the personal experience of clients, the facets influencing philosophical uptake beyond dialectical thinking, and considering how philosophical practice impacts demographics, such as adolescents or elderly individuals, can provide an enriched perspective of philosophical practice in the context of China.

In conclusion, while this study highlights the significant potential and value of philosophical practice in China, it also highlights the essence of embracing an integrated approach

encompassing a wider array of cultural factors. This multifaceted understanding sets the stage for harnessing the full potential of philosophical practice, allowing it to serve as a robust tool for nurturing emotional resilience and promoting well-being among China's diverse population. Thus, continued investigation of specific subsets within Chinese culture, deeper immersion in client experiences, and advancements in termination protocols are required to maximize the impact of philosophical practice on well-being in China.

Data availability

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Author contributions

F.C. developed the main conceptual ideas, provided critical feedback, oversaw the writing of the paper, and acted as the corresponding author. Y.W. assisted in refining the concepts, contributed to the discussion elements of the paper, and provided input on the manuscript. J.M. contributed to the development and refinement of the central ideas, participated in drafting sections of the manuscript. T.H. contributed to the theoretical framework of the paper, providing critical feedback, and helped in the coherence and editing process of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript before submission.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

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