



Proverb: An Indigenous Approach To Counseling Psychology With A Focus On Ao Naga '*Shin O*'

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Abstract: The term “Shin O,” meaning “Proverb” in English, serves as an effective mechanism that enhances clarity in communication between the sender and the receiver. The notion of “Shin O” exemplifies a distinctive integration of indigenous knowledge and practices in counseling psychology, illustrating the vital importance of cultural context in mental health. This methodology respects local practices and aims to establish a more inclusive framework for psychological support that aligns with indigenous communities. The Ao Naga community actively engages the Shin O, which significantly contributes to mental health counseling. The listener thus deeply resonates with its powerful influence. The proverbs imparted by the elders possess profound meaning, impacting the Indigenous community in numerous facets of life. Although it may be difficult for outsiders to comprehend, within the Ao Naga community, elders often employ Shin O when addressing individuals in private contexts and larger audiences during social events. Elders not only use the Shin O in their statements but also explain its importance by articulating their expectations in return, as they sincerely believe that individuals will derive lessons from it and experience personal transformation. The elders of the Ao Naga use Shin O to make their message more inspiring and therefore engage their audiences’ attention. Shin O is distinguished by its ability to communicate truth through metaphor, making it relatable to people from all social classes. The current study employs a qualitative, conceptual approach.

Keywords- Counseling, Indigenous Approach, Shin O, Ao Naga

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals globally possess varied preferences and practices. Likewise, the indigenous community exists in a manner that distinguishes them from others. Everyone possesses a distinct perspective and unique characteristics, rendering it indefensible to assert that any theory or therapy is universally applicable. The indigenous community is acknowledged as the original inhabitants of a particular society, inhabiting a geographical region that has been inherited through generations. Their existence is centered on oral traditions devoid of written records; nevertheless, all individuals pursue a shared objective and comply with established regulations that have been transmitted through generations unquestioningly. For the inhabitants, local or indigenous identity is a source of pride. This identity cultivates a sense of community, enabling peaceful coexistence, provided the external world does not disturb their serene environment. The populace desires to adhere to their methods and approaches, which they consider superior to those imposed externally. The study emphasizes the significance of integrating indigenous practices in counseling for indigenous communities to promote healing and cultural heritage. The study therefore seeks to enhance

comprehension of Shin O in counseling across various cultures, particularly within the context of Ao Naga, without utilizing empirical data from a sample population.

The Ao Naga Dictionary by Rev. E. W. Clark defines the term “Shin O” as an old saying, adage, maxim, ancient prediction, traditional instruction, tradition, apothegm, or appropriate proverb. The meaning occasionally intersects with prophecy, which can signify predicting, foretelling, or conveying information in advance. The term “Shin” can be succinctly understood as described. The term “O” on the other hand is synonymous with words such as ‘discourse,’ ‘speech,’ ‘language,’ ‘account,’ ‘narrative,’ and ‘affair’, it likely represents language. This definition illustrates the dual function of “Shin O” as a cultural artifact and a vehicle for imparting wisdom, indicating that Shin O convey ideas and influence behaviors within a therapeutic framework. By connecting language with profound insights, it demonstrates the significance of Shin O in promoting comprehension and directing behavior within a community.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is an effective method that prompts individuals to articulate their emotions via storytelling, enabling them to access their intrinsic resilience and strengths. By redirecting attention from issues like disappointment and guilt to potential solutions, SFBT cultivates a more optimistic perspective on personal challenges. This approach is especially advantageous for individuals who may feel overwhelmed by their situations, as it offers a definitive and concise route to healing and self-empowerment. Adapting SFBT to the distinct cultural contexts of indigenous communities can markedly improve its efficacy. Indigenous populations, such as the Ao Naga tribal community, often face challenges in accessing adequate mental health resources. The lack of a formal counseling framework designed to address their unique cultural requirements can impede the efficacy of any therapeutic method, including SFBT. Therapists can enhance the therapeutic environment by incorporating traditional narratives and communal values. This procedure demonstrates respect for and appreciation of the diverse cultural heritage of these communities while also fostering emotional well-being. This culturally attuned adaptation enhances individual resilience while cultivating a sense of belonging and support within the community. The traditional counseling practices of the Ao Naga community, emphasizing the informal and flexible nature of their approach through Shin O. By focusing on SFBT in a supportive environment, the method has the potential to empower individuals to take control of their lives and promotes optimism and resilience.

Concept of Collectivism and Individualism:

Different societies have distinct cultures, and it is this culture that unites the people who coexist within a particular society. It is often said that a person’s nature, combined with the cultural aspects of their society, shapes their identity. The Ao Naga, a tribal community in India, has unique tastes, interests, and habits that set it apart from the broader population. As easterners, the general populace tends to reach out and connect with others, yet they quickly refocus on their individual selves when the situation demands. Similarly, when necessary, the Ao Naga tribal community expands its established boundaries to engage with the wider world. This distinction draws attention to the ways in which cultural frameworks influence perceptions of identity and relationships, while also effecting behaviors and interactions with other people. The differences in these perspectives on the self ultimately contribute to the formation of larger societal values and norms in both Eastern and Western contexts.

Shin O: Similarity Found in other Traditions

Weng, Zhang, Kulich & Zuo (2020) define proverbs as brief yet enduring sayings that reflect people’s beliefs, attitudes, and values, serving as important carriers and mirrors of cultural heritage. It is assumed the reflections of one’s own culture can often lead to a positive outcome for clients as they navigate their challenges. A common thread across cultures is that proverbs serve as instruments of wise counsel,

profound advice in just a few words allowing for deeper interpretations. In Chinese tradition, proverbs are regarded as short, wise, and memorable expressions that offer advice, convey universal truths, or impart cultural wisdom. They are often passed down through generations and serve as concise means to encapsulate deep insights or lessons learned from experiences. Proverbs provide practical guidance, inspire personal growth, and offer solace during challenging times. Proverbs help individuals to quickly identify their problems through crystallized keywords (Zhong, 2007). In a way, Chinese proverbs are cultural products (like myths, fairytales, folk stories, plays, and operas), reflecting the society's basic philosophical ideas (Hsu and Tseng 1974). Proverbs are often used as folk guides on how to deal with difficult situations which is significant. It thus ends knowledge that Chinese people customarily use proverbs in their daily lives as philosophical guides to cope with their problems, particularly in times of distress (Zhong 2008; Tseng, Hsu, Ebata, Kim & Kim 2005). According to Zhong (2008) in his work *Application of proverbs in psychotherapy for the Chinese*, following are some examples showing the kinds of Chinese proverbs which may be used depending on the clients' needs; Having difficulty revealing embarrassment meaning Human is not tree or grass, it is common to feel embarrassed or Appetite and sexual desire are human nature (no need to be embarrassed by your private desire or feeling); Tend to somatize their problems without dealing with their feelings it simply means Anger will push your hat up (by the elected hair) or Anxious hearts make the fresh tremble; Indulging in fantasy and not dealing with reality meaning Sitting on the bottom of the well to see the sky or Painting the cake to deal with hunger; Having limited knowledge or being short-sighted with problems meaning Covering your ears to steal the ring or Climbing the tree to seek for the fish; Having lack of patience, being eager for quick achievement meaning Dropping water can penetrate the stone or Stupid old man can move the mountain; Tending to regret and blame one's self for failure meaning Not too late to repair the cage after losing the sheep or Failure is the mother of success; Having a shortage of courage to deal with problems meaning Without entering the tiger cave, one cannot catch the baby tiger or A one thousand mile journey starts with the first step.

Additionally, in African tradition, proverbs serve as metaphors for practical living and as a means of imparting wisdom to younger members of the tribe. This is why Africans use proverbs in conversation to express ideas that ordinary words cannot convey (Awaritefe, Chinonye & Deborah, 2018). According to the review of literature the African elders incorporate proverbs into their discussions, ensuring relevance to the topic at hand. Africans believe that traditional counseling employs indigenous techniques to assist individuals within a culturally appropriate framework. Proverbs serve a crucial function, providing counsel and wisdom that impart fundamental life lessons regarding acceptable conduct within society. African proverbs are known for giving important and meaningful life lessons in simple messages and thus it is known for helping many people all over the world in many different situations. Out of many proverbs some of it are; If there is no enemy within, the enemy outside can do us no harm meaning when you refuse to allow any doubts in your own mind, then no doubts from others will ever cloud your judgment; When a needle falls into a well, many people will look into the well, but only a few will be ready to go down after it meaning many claim to want success but few will work for it; another important proverb that teaches life lesson is Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped meaning Don't look at your mistakes, look at what caused you to make the mistakes in other words it means you should look at the cause of things going wrong, rather than the symptoms.

Similarly, the Ao Nagas community collaborates closely, providing support to one another and actively engaging as a collective safety net in various ways. They utilize folk wisdom as a means of reaching out to those in need. The Aos regard Shin O as a form of belief or knowledge that originates from ordinary individuals and is passed down through generations, much like the traditions of the Chinese and African cultures. Consequently, in the context of indigenous approaches to problem-solving, proverbs function as a vital instrument across diverse Asian cultures, encompassing the Chinese, Africans, and the Ao Naga tribe of Northeast India. A plethora of proverbs exists to assist and guide individuals in their daily lives. In addition to conveying life principles, these proverbs instruct on how to lead a morally upright and dignified

existence. Elders in Ao Naga families and social gatherings frequently utilize Shin O to instruct and educate children at home, and these Shin O are also employed in public speeches during diverse social events. Some of the commonly used Shin O by the Aos are; *Taksep nung Ak tar asepa ama* meaning A vacillating person who keeps changing his or her decision; *An molukpang nung atem* meaning Knowingly putting oneself into trouble; *Tzürongpang nung asadok ama* meaning No point talking with those who have rigid mind; *Shitikolak per agi menempangtet* it simply mean to say after committing crime, one could no longer hide one's shame and disgrace; *Tsüraburtemi tasen achi nung chirnur tepu mejemer* meaning judging someone's character based on their parenting style in brief it mean to say children suffer the consequences of their parents actions. Thus, Ao Naga elders employ Shin O when addressing unacceptable behavior or attitudes in conversation. It is widely recognized that numerous proverbs employed by the Ao Nagas are pragmatic and are typically considered as teachings of wisdom. Literature highlights Indigenous communities, whether Chinese, African, or part of the Ao Naga tribe of Northeast India, greatly depends on folk wisdom.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study employs qualitative, conceptual method. The study focus on the already established written literature as well as invaluable direct experience preserved in oral traditions of the Ao Naga elders.

IV. CURRENT APPLICATIONS IN THERAPY

Proverbs, as integral components of indigenous psychology, not only encapsulate cultural wisdom but also serve as vital tools for fostering community resilience. Their ability to convey profound insights makes them particularly effective in counseling contexts, where clients struggle to express their emotions. By utilizing proverbs or Shin O, counselors can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary therapeutic practices, allowing for a more culturally sensitive approach. This is especially critical in diverse settings, such as schools, where the emotional needs of students from various backgrounds often go unaddressed. The effectiveness of proverbs in narrative therapy highlights the importance of cultural relevance in therapeutic practices. When counselors draw upon familiar stories and metaphors that resonate with the client's lived experiences, they create a safe space for exploration and healing. For instance, in the case of individuals from the Ao Naga tribal community, incorporating culturally specific proverbs can empower clients to articulate their feelings indirectly. This method not only respects their cultural background but also encourages self-reflection and personal growth, demonstrating the potential of integrating indigenous wisdom into modern therapeutic frameworks.

Customize Model of *Shin O* in SFBT: Ao Naga Context

Vignette:

Client Profile: Mr. XYZ is a music educator with a record of unsuccessful relationships. He finds it challenging to cope with his stress; thus, he relies on alcohol to ease his mind.

Illustration: The vignette details how Mr. XYZ uses alcohol as a stress reliever whenever he is back home from his work. To overcome his loneliness and failed relationships, he finds solace drinking alcohol. He considers and thinks to himself, "I am good for nothing," and "No one loves me."

Building Trust: As a counselor, it is essential to establish trust with the client; the counselor should take the initiative in starting the conversation. Beginning with an engaging statement can capture the listener's attention. For instance, the counselor might say "*Na kanga dang sempet tajung aika lir*," which translates to "you are someone gifted in many areas" or "talented." This approach helps the client feel valued and appreciated. As the dialogue progresses, the counselor can help the client recognize their importance to both their family and the wider community. The counselor can incorporate proverbs such as "*Tebilem dang*

belimba agi mapa takok mongutettsü” (thinking alone cannot progress without hard work), “*Mapang tajung alangzukung*” (make use of the moment), and “*Takok mongutetra tasa melenshiang*” (if you fail to achieve, change the strategy, not the goal). This Shin O can inspire the client to consider “giving it a try.” It is essential for the counselor to convey to the client that if they are considering giving up alcohol, they must not only think about it but also take action to avoid the consequences of their decision. These kinds of actions might involve exerting effort or looking for support from people who are trusted individuals.

Miracle Questions: How do you picture yourself drinking alcohol for the rest of your life? This question is intended to assist the client in visualizing a future free of difficulties, one in which he is able to break free from a lifestyle that is harmful to him. To encourage him, the counselor can use the Shin O, “*Merang dangba nung takoksa mali*” which translates to “there is no harm in trying.” During the session, the client will be able to visualize a life that is different from the one he is currently living. This life will include a better and healthier way of life, increased responsibility, and engagement with people both within and outside of the community.

Scaling Questions: The counselor may ask the client to evaluate their progress in life while they have abstained from drinking alcohol throughout the process. As an illustration, they might inquire, “How would you rate yourself on a scale that ranges from one through ten?” This scaling question is meant to inspire the client to improve by providing hope and motivation based on the small changes they have made so far. The counselor can motivate the client by employing Shin O like “*Tanu kumzüka lira, asung menutsü*” (if you are safe today, you will laugh tomorrow) and “*Meshi ana dak chipo metongtaker*” (certain missions cannot be accomplished without decree).

Other techniques include providing clients with compliments on their strengths, establishing specific goals, utilizing coping questions to emphasize resilience, and assigning homework to support progress between sessions are some additional techniques that can be utilized.

V. DISCUSSION

For ages, the Ao Naga community has distinguished itself in multiple facets of life. The village demonstrates significant social cohesion, grounded in its Ao customs and traditions. It is said that the emergence of ranges, tribes, and the Naga as a group among the nations became known only after the Naga territory was dominated by British Indian Administration (Bendangkokba, 2019). Prior to the advent of modern civilization, the villages in Nagaland, especially those of the Ao tribe, were administered by a council of elders known as the “*Putu Menden*” or “*Tatar Menden*,” commonly termed as the village council. The Ao villages are structured into six distinct ranges, each encompassing multiple villages. Every village possesses a council of elders, representing each clan within the community. The council’s size is contingent upon the number of clans in the village, and all activities, including disciplinary actions and decision-making, are governed and managed by this council. The village council establishes customary procedures and laws, thereby assuming the authority of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (Bendangkokba, 2019).

The Ao Nagas possesses a unique pattern for addressing challenges similar to other Nagas; the community resides in a distinctly defined egalitarian society. The cornerstone of the Ao Naga society is the clan system, which is rooted in the belief that the first three men to arise from the earth were representatives of three separate clans: Pongener, Longkumer, and Jamir. Currently, these are the three principal clans among the Aos (Temsula, 2012; Bendangangshi & Aier, 1997). Although there exist supplementary clans with distinct designations, it is said all can trace their ancestry to one of these principal clans. The clan therefore plays a vital role in all aspects of an individual’s life events, alongside the community (well-wishers). Bendangkokba (2019) points out that each Naga tribe has a unique system of village governance that

operates autonomously from external influence. Thus, the Ao tribe is administered by a council of elders referred to as “*Tatars*,” comprising representatives from every clan. Furthermore, it is observed that in Ao villages, each clan possesses a distinct administrative framework known as “*Kidong-Mapang*,” which is known as the “*clan in charge*.” All societal affairs are being carried out by such elders within the community. In other words, each community shares numerous similarities, and the conduct of individuals is observed and governed by the elders and esteemed figures within each community. Guidance and counselling are provided as advice or wise teaching to families or members of the local community during significant life events, such as the initiation of young people at puberty, preparation for marriage, times of bereavement, and participation in traditional, religious, ritual, and social ceremonies. Children are instructed on diverse elements of social norms, ethical principles, and behavioral standards within community life. The lifestyle of the Ao Naga tribal community is characterized by a small population, which fosters close acquaintance among its members. Indigenous counseling approaches emphasize the significance of cultural context in therapeutic practices. By prioritizing culture centrism, counselors can create a safe environment where clients feel understood and valued within their cultural framework. This recognition builds trust and strengthens the therapeutic relationship, allowing clients to talk about their worries and hopes without fear. The counselor’s choice of the right Shin O, or technique, for the client shows that they care about the client’s identity and are willing to work with them in a way that is respectful of their culture and situation, ultimately promoting the overall well-being.

***Shin O* as Cultural Artifacts**

It serves as collective wisdom: Shin O represents an abundance of collective wisdom, woven from the experiences and insights of countless generations. This form of knowledge not only preserves the values and lessons of the past but also serves as a vital tool for navigating the complexities of the present and future. As such, it acts as a bridge between the ages, allowing younger members of the community to glean important life lessons from their elders. The transmission of Shin O often occurs through storytelling, rituals, and communal gatherings, where the wisdom of the past is shared in a manner that is both engaging and accessible. Understanding Shin O enriches one’s understanding of contemporary issues, enabling them to draw upon historical lessons and apply them to modern dilemmas. In this way, Shin O preserves the past and empowers future generations to make informed decisions, ensuring that the collective knowledge remains alive and relevant.

***Shin O* reflects cultural values and norms:** Shin O serves as a profound lens through which one can examine the cultural norms and values that shape the society. Its concise nature belies the depth of its exploration of the complexities of human experience. By encapsulating a broad range of societal values, it invites us to reflect on the ethical principles that govern our interactions and decisions. The emphasis on morals within Shin O encourages individuals to consider how their actions resonate within the community, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal choices and collective well-being. Moreover, this reflection is not merely theoretical; it has practical implications for how we navigate our daily lives. As we engage with the principles presented in Shin O, we are prompted to evaluate our beliefs and behaviors in light of the cultural narratives that influence us. This introspection can lead to a greater awareness of the ethical dilemmas we face and the societal expectations that often accompany them. Thus, Shin O becomes more than just a concept; it is a catalyst for personal growth and a more profound understanding of our roles within the fabric of society.

It monitors moral principles: Shin O plays a crucial role in fostering harmony within the community by addressing conflicts and nurturing relationships among its members. This mediation not only resolves immediate disputes but also contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of individual identities. By encouraging open communication and collaboration, Shin O helps individuals recognize their unique contributions while reinforcing a sense of belonging. As members engage in dialogue and work through

their differences, they develop stronger connections that benefit not only personal growth but also the community's cohesion. In addition to conflict resolution, Shin O's commitment to upholding moral principles serves as a guiding framework for community interactions. By monitoring ethical standards, Shin O ensures that members adhere to shared values, which promotes trust and accountability. This oversight is essential in creating an environment where individuals feel safe to express themselves and explore their identities without fear of judgment. Ultimately, Shin O's dual focus on resolving conflicts and maintaining moral integrity cultivates a vibrant community where all members can thrive.

VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: The study has significant practical implications, as it provides a deeper understanding of a client's culture and tradition, which can aid in the counselor's ability to communicate more effectively, establish trust, and tailor interventions to effectively address the specific needs of the client.

VII. LIMITATIONS: The lack of empirical data limits the current study, which is primarily conceptual in nature.

VIII. FUTURE RESEARCH: The study is primarily theoretical, relying on existing scholarly literature and information obtained from the oral traditions of community elders. Consequently, future researchers may conduct a thorough scientific study to evaluate the therapeutic application of Shin O within the Ao Naga tribal society.

IX. CONCLUSION

Shin O signifies cultural knowledge obtained from authority. It is frequently concise, emblematic, and metaphorical, permitting diverse interpretations across multiple dimensions, both concrete and abstract. Shin O encapsulate the conventional values, beliefs, and experiences of a particular society, providing profound insights that direct individuals toward ethical conduct. The Shin O functions as a fundamental component in the discussions of the Ao Naga elders within their community. Elders who integrate the profound Shin O into their discourse facilitate the transmission of this traditional knowledge across generations, rendering its application unique. All wisdom is transmitted across generations, enhancing its distinctive application. The Ao Nagas, akin to other folk traditions, have inherited proverbs from their ancestors that have been passed down through generations. Although these proverbs may seem straightforward to the Aos, they can be complex and difficult to comprehend. Not with standing their simplicity, the words possess profound significance. Consequently, Ao elders employ proverbs contextually, modifying them to fit circumstances. Thus, the Shin O is integral to the indigenous counseling practices of the Aos. Employing cultural proverbs as therapeutic method in counseling psychology can thus promote an effective and culturally sensitive approach that merits additional investigation.

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