Crossing Borders
Edipus in Asia and the Resistance to Psychoanalysis

Geoffrey Blowers

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When, in a letter to Nature in 1923 headed “Psychoanalysis and Anthropology,” Bronislaw Malinowski reported on the “original constitution” of the family structure as he had observed it “amongst present day savages” of the Trobiand Islands, he sought to revise rather than to refute psychoanalytic concepts in the light of his ethnographic evidence. He argued that in the matrilinial kinship system of the Trobrianders, the fierce and “tyrannical” father of Totem and Taboo was missing. The central tenets of a “repressive authority” and a “severing taboo” worked elsewhere “in a manner different from that of the patriarchal family” so that, if the general theory of Freud were correct, “the repressed wish formation ought to receive a shape different from the Edipus Complex.”

In several subsequent papers published a year later, Malinowski developed these ideas by drawing upon his observations of the development of male Trobriander children. Without a prohibiting father, according to him, a child’s sexuality proceeded along with its social development, with the “cravings for its mother” expiring in “a natural spontaneous manner” but its genital sexuality generally was never “dislodged.” The later intervention of the mother’s brother to enforce the taboo of physical contact with the boy’s sister holds in check his homicidal and incestuous wishes for her, this being, for Malinowski, evidence of a different nuclear complex. By drawing into sharper relief the relationship between biological and social development in different kinds of family structure, this led him to assert that adherents of orthodox psychoanalysis, rather than assuming the universality of the Edipus complex, should study “every type of civilisation, to establish the special complex that pertains to it.”

1923年，布鲁威斯劳·马里诺夫斯基给《自然》杂志写了一封名为“精神分析学与人类学”的信，报告了他曾在特罗布里恩群岛的“现存野蛮人”中观察到的家庭结构的“原始组成”，希望通过对人的种族证据来修正一些精神分析学的概念，而非驳斥它们。他指出，特罗布里恩群岛的母系氏族体系中，《图腾与禁忌》中没有凶残残暴的父亲形象。“压抑性权威”和“刻板禁忌”的一些核心原则以“一种不同于父系家庭的方式”在别地方起作用；因而，如果弗洛伊德的总体理论是正确的，压抑愿望的形成就应该接受一种不同于俄狄浦斯情结的外化。

弗洛伊德学派的权威代表欧内斯特·琼斯很快就对这种修正主义的观点做出了回应。1924年，英国皇家人类学会对马里诺夫斯基的做法展开了激烈的讨论，于是该学会在那一年邀请琼斯做了一次讲座。琼斯提出，马里诺夫斯基所观察到的野蛮人对其父亲的忽视显示出他们的从容态度，其结果就是将“某种可能带来不快后果的关系中的情感”转移及“放置到某个更安全的距离”。十四年之后，弗洛伊德再次想起了这件事——当时，疾病而客居伦敦的他收到了由马里诺夫斯基写给安娜的一封信，马里诺夫斯基在信中将自己称为“[弗洛伊德]及其工作的忠实仰慕者”，对此弗洛伊德表现出来一种惊讶，因为他一直更留意马里诺夫斯基对“[他的]观点的反对与否定”。


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Ernest Jones, representing the Freudian establishment, was quick to respond to this attempted revision of orthodoxy. Malinowski’s work was hotly debated in the Royal Anthropological Society in 1924, and Jones had been invited to deliver a lecture before it that year. Jones assumed that Malinowski’s observations of savages’ ignorance of their paternity indicated denial on their part, the effect of which was to shift the “affect in a relationship where it might have unpleasant consequences and depositing it at a safer distance.” Freud was reminded of this fourteen years later when, frail and ill and in exile in London, he received a letter from Malinowski addressed to Anna describing himself as a “devoted admirer of [Freud] and his work” to which Freud expressed pleasant surprise as he had been more aware of his “opposition and contradiction to [his] views.”

Jones’s reinstatement of the foundational role of the Oedipus complex, however, was already at odds with others in the movement, notably Otto Rank, whom Malinowski had cited. As editor of Imago, he had republished both Malinowski’s and Jones’s articles. Rank, in The Trauma of Birth, raised the radical idea that all paternal conflicts with the father, including Oedipal ones, were but a chimera to more “essential ones concerning birth.” His placing the mother at the centre of the child’s first dealings with the world brought to the fore the important role she plays in nurturing, and prioritised it over the potentially castrating role of the father. Freud initially accepted Rank’s work as a contribution, but did not feel it had much of a future, little realising how his ambivalence toward the work would be used by members of his secret committee to drive a wedge between the two.

Bengal beckons
But disagreements with Freud over the centrality of the Oedipus complex were not confined to Europeans. In 1920, Freud received the first of several letters from Girindra Sekhar Bose, an Indian medical doctor who had turned to experimental psychology and completed a doctoral thesis on the subject of repression, a copy of which he sent to Freud. Suitably impressed that psychoanalysis had been recognised in a “far country,” Freud wrote a short introduction for Bose when his thesis was published as a book. Following the formation of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society and its affiliation to the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1922, he also asked Bose if he would like his name appended to the masthead of both the Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse and the English language International...
However, Zeno really has to be the proximate of the newborn’s birth and the movement of his father in the world of his mother. He was the one who had been born to the woman of the village who had given birth to a son. This boy, whom Zeno had been born to, was Zeno’s brother.

Ganesha was one of the sons of the goddess Devi (the other being Skanda) who, amongst her many incarnations, is known as the conqueror of the demon Mohaisuras whom she destroyed along with most of his army. She effected this feat through the power of her own wisdom.


Ganesha the elephant-headed god, is one of the most popular deities in Hindu mythology. He is known for his wisdom and intelligence, as well as his love for sweets. He is often depicted with an elephant head on the body of a human.

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medium of riding naked to battle and dancing, cutting off the heads of thousands and thousands as she wielded her sword. When Mahisamata tried to escape by transforming himself into an elephant, she cut off his trunk; when he transmuted to a buffalo whose thick hide made her swordplay impotent, she rode the buffalo to the point of exhaustion and then killed it by driving a spear through its neck. Karaka suggests she is the phallic mother, the half-male, half female who incorporates through her son's attachment to her his wish to be a man without having to separate from her. However, her husband Shiva becomes a rival for his wife's affection and in the mythical narrative kills his son who stands guard at her bedroom while she bathes. Ganesha represents that half of the boy who refuses individuation and liberation through maternally separation.

Freud's written reply to Bose on receiving his theoretical and popular papers was neutral in tone. Christiane Hartnack, in her book Psychoanalysis in Colonial India, details several anecdotes that suggest, however, that Freud was far from happy about this revision, even though in his penultimate letter to Bose he acknowledges that the bipolar nature of wishes shows up in three relatively neglected areas of bisexuality: masculinity/femininity, love/hate and activity/passivity. Freud's major criticism of Bose's ideas was that they were too “morphological,” an euphemism for Freud seems to have employed to cover his disdain for what he took to be Bose's lack of empirical support for his own theory. Nonetheless, in this same letter, Freud wrote to Bose a paper detailing these central tenets for publication in the two international psychoanalytical journals, but this seems not to have occurred.

An overture from Japan

During the period of his exchanges with Bose in the 1920s and early 1930s Freud also entered into correspondence with a psychologist and a literatus from Japan. Each of them had read and been impressed by Freud's work and three had travelled to see him on separate visits with a view to being analysed by him. That story has been told elsewhere but its significance for the current paper is that one of these early admirers of Freud, Kosawa Hikoriko, travelled to Vienna in 1931, and although he could not afford an analysis with Freud who passed him on to Richard Sterba, he did present him with a paper he had written about his ideas on the Edipus complex as it might pertain to Japanese culture. Hoping for a considered reply, Freud gave him only

反趋势也变得有所意识。这些交替
变化仍以一种拉锯的方式继续，但
起作用的罗素将随着时间的推移而
减弱。他得出一种理论，这种拉
锯虽然与其自身的关系，但他需要消
磨时间。于是他倡导他的精神分析
接受者，让其将自己置于对象的位
置，于是形成一种新的联想。

正是由此理论为部分基础，
伯西也重新定义俄狄浦斯情结。
出于他的相对趋势理论，那种希
望成为男性的情欲伴随成为女性
的情欲。用伯西自己的话就是“这
种希望成为女性的情欲在印度比在
欧洲的男性病人中更容易实现。俄
狄浦斯的女性则是一个复杂的父
性形象，而且这种事实具有非常重
要的意义。我有理由相信，‘母性
神明’的很大一部分动机来源于
此。”(10)这个人物的重要意义在于
它能消解阉割的威胁，这正如从俄
狄浦斯儿童身上所体现出来的，因
为那种希望成为女性的相对愿望(暗
中接受阉割)缓解了这种恐惧。按照
阿德勒，卡尔的说，伯西申
到这一点是母性神明的证明，
从印度文化中的伟大女性神明那
里予以理解。(11)在卡尔对神明
的一个解释中，他提出了俄狄浦斯
的性向，即俄狄浦斯情结。(12)

迦乃沙是女神参维的两个儿
子之一，另一个儿子叫斯堪达。参
维具有许多称号，其中之一是邪魔
乌西撒拉的征服者，她消灭了乌
西撒拉及她大部分军队。她成就
此举的主要方法是依靠乌山马走马
战场，一路死命奔走，挥着她的宝
剑砍下了成千上万的头颅。当乌西
撒拉被砍死一见大怒想要逃跑时，
她砍下了他的象牙；当他变成一只
牛时，他的厚皮使她的宝剑失去了
作用，于是她骑上牛并拼命驱
赶，使其劳累不堪，然后用一只长
矛刺入它的脖子而杀死了它。卡尔
认为她是—位半男孩半女孩的性
器崇拜的母亲。通过她儿子对她的
依恋，使那种情欲成为男人而同时
又不与其父亲的欲望融入自身。然
而，她的丈夫成为妻子情感的对
手，传说中她杀死了守在妻子浴室
房间门口的儿子。迦乃沙的形象代
表了半只男孩，拒绝与母亲分
离的个性化和自由化过程。

弗洛伊德则在接到伯西寄来的理
论性及普通论文之后，给伯西回
了一封信中说“极感兴趣”的信。克里
斯汀内·哈特奈克在其《精神分析法
殖民地印度》(13)中详细讨论了斯
此信，这篇文章说明，弗洛伊德
改对伯西的这种修正十分不满，尽
管他在给伯西的倒数第二封信中
the briefest of replies: “Dear Doctor, I have received and read your essay. I'll keep it with me since it seems as if you have no intention to use it otherwise.”

18. Freud to Klosow, July 30th 1932. In German in the original.

In Kosawa’s version, Oedipus becomes the Ajase complex in his paper entitled “Two Kinds of Guilt.” He modifies the concept, taking account, in Japanese society, of the mutual dependency that develops between mothers and their children. The myth of Ajase can be traced to two Buddhist texts. These are the Nirvana Sutra [The Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life], introduced to Japan between 700 and 1000 AD, and the Kyogoshinsho [The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land], written by Shinran Shonin (1173-1262), a celebrated Japanese priest of the Kamakura period (1185-1333).

The myth centres on Ajase’s lifelong dependency upon his mother toward whom he initially targets his hostility, and then becomes resolved to her undying affection. It tells of an Indian prince Ajatosatru (Ajase) and his mother, Idaake, a woman who fears that her fading beauty makes her no longer attractive to her husband, King Bimbashara, the protector of Buddha. This leads her to desire a child and, on the advice of a soothsayer, to become pregnant with the reincarnated soul of a hermit after his death. Impatient for this natural event to occur, she hastens by murdering the hermit, who curses her on his deathbed with the prophecy that he will return in the form of her son, the Prince, to murder her husband. Fearful of her unborn son’s revenge (the hermit’s curse) she attempts to kill him at birth by dropping him from her womb at a great height. He survives the fall but breaks his finger, and is later reminded of the origin of this event by Dabudatta, an enemy of Buddha. Enraged in feelings of rage he attempts to kill his mother, Idaake, but is overpowered by the feelings of guilt that he feels seriously ill, and is only nursed back to health by her intervention. Idaake’s charitable act resolves her own conflicts over her son who recovers to become a wise king.

Kosawa’s use of the story exemplifies, for him, the fundamental issue of birth. According to his own later student, Okonogi, who would go on to develop the psychological consequences of this structure itself, the originality of Kosawa’s Ajase complex lies in its themes of matricide and “prenatal nancour” (from the Buddhist concept of mishon, or resentment towards one’s origin), in contrast to the Oedipus Complex, which emphasizes incestuous desire and patricide. The mother wishes both to have her child and to kill it, her ambivalent feelings arising out of her desire to exercise power over its life and death, and the paranoid fear of retaliation that a projection of this desire onto the child brings in its wake. On the other hand, the ambivalent feelings of the child arise out of an idealism of the mother as a love

14. Freud to Klosow, July 30th 1932. In German in the original.
16. One of the Chinese characters for Ajase’s name means “broken finger”.

18. G. Freud to Klosow, July 30th 1932.
object and the knowledge that she is capable of killing it. As to the question of the two kinds of guilt in the original paper's title, in the Greek story, Oedipus, upon realizing the horror of his act(s) inflicts self-punishment by tearing out his eyes, an act motivated by the burden of his crime. According to Kosawa, Ajase's feelings of guilt change over the course of the story's development. After attempting to kill his mother he is frightened by punishment and falls ill. This resembles the "persecutory guilt" of which members of the Kleinian school speak. After Ajase's mother pardons him, he feels remorse towards her, what Kleinians call "repertory guilt." As Kosawa's paper dates from 1932, the question of whether his thinking was influenced by Melanie Klein's ideas, or anticipated them, remains an open one.

Like Bose's version, Kosawa's can be seen as a considered modification of the orthodox view of psychical development at that time, and another attempt at an Asian cultural variant on what, for Freud, was a universal mechanism. Freud's evasive comment on it suggests its possible displeasure at its contents.

The Chinese case

Although Freud faced no similar problem of being presented with a reworked version of Oedipus from China, in 1929, nonetheless, he received a letter from the dissenting Chinese intellectual Zhang Shizhao. Although the letter has disappeared, Freud's extant brief reply suggested its contents.

Most esteemed Professor,

In whatever way you wish to carry out your intention, whether it is by paving the way for the development of psychoanalysis in your homeland - China - or by contributions to our journal Image in which you would judge against your own language our conjectures about the nature of archaic modes of expression, I will be extremely pleased. What I quoted in my lectures from the Chinese, was taken from an article in the Encyclopedia Britannica (11th edition).

Very respectfully,

Yours Freud"}

22. This plays on a strong cultural element for it was sometimes a custom in Japan up to the Edo period (1603-1868) for mothers to kill their children in times of famine.
23. Klein wrote of the need for the baby, in the course of its development, to separate good and bad objects of the same object about which it has fantasies, and about which it can harbour ambivalent feelings of love and hate. Beginning with anxieties over being attacked by a bad object (mother/other), the baby shifts to fears for the safety and return of the good. Its feelings of perception give way to depression, which becomes the motive for separation. See, for example, Melanie Klein, Love, Guilt and Reparation, and other works, London: Hogarth Press, 1975.
24. Although Freud initially offered to analyze some of a reduced rate, his analysis was eventually taken over by Richard Strach.
26. Freud's letter first appeared as a photographic reprint of the original appearing in a preface to Zhang Shizhao's translation of Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1950). The letter was not translated into Chinese until many years later and appears in Yu Feng, Psychoanalysis and Modern Chinese Novels (1987). The translation here is from the German original.

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神州交流
Zhang had worked a couple of years earlier on a translation of Freud's Selbstdarstellung. He was likely making overtures to Freud about the possibility of disseminating his works in China through translations, but the focus of the reply suggested he was curious about Freud's understanding of Chinese, and was intending to write an article for Imagine testing his assumptions. As it happened, Zhang's article(s) for Imagine never materialized. Meanwhile, he published his translation of Freud's autobiography a year later.27

Intellectuals in China in the 1920s had shown considerable interest in psychoanalysis as judged by the number of translations of Freud's works and those of his early followers into Chinese.28 Secondary articles on psychoanalysis,29 and the use of Freudian ideas in Chinese literature.30 Although this interest did not develop a therapeutic culture of depth in psychology—much of the focus at the time was on Freud's theory of sublimation as a healthy outlet for unsuitable desires which could then be put into the service of others—31 the debates that unfolded in this period seriously challenged the idea that the Oedipal myth stood as a psychodynamic exemplar of Chinese family structure. To the contrary, as contemporary scholarship has shown, the Confucian model, stressing a lifelong filial devotion by sons in respect of their fathers, required a different myth.32 One likely candidate is to be found in the classical story of the Bend in Fen River [Fenhe Wan], also known as Xue Li's Return Home [Xue Li Huan jia], which became incorporated into Peking Opera.

The story concerns Xue Li, or Xue Rengui, a soldier a fortune of the Tang period who became a high ranking military officer and whose skills at archery brought him to the attention of the Emperor who assigned him duty in a distant land. The crux of the tale hinges on his return home to his wife whom he has not seen since he left her pregnant 18 years earlier. As Xue approaches his home, he sees a young man standing on the bank of the River Fen skillfully shooting geese and challenges him to a test of his marksmanship. The young man accepts the challenge but Xue, instead of shooting geese, shoots the youth instead, claiming that he could have spared the boy but could not let another live who was superior in marksmanship. When he finally arrives home the exchange with his wife turns to doubts of her fidelity, exacerbated by seeing an unfamiliar pair of shoes under their marital bed. His wife chides him for his doubts saying the shoes belong to his son.

27. It was in Zhang's preface to his translation that a photographic reprint of Freud's letter first appeared. The letter was dated May 27th 1929.


whose is out hunting. The dénouement comes with their horrifying discovery that Xue has killed their son.

The tale’s structure is almost the opposite of the Oedipal myth. It is Xue, the father rather than the son who leaves home to make his fortune (Oedipus was abandoned), and it is the father who kills the son. But like the Oedipal myth, the killing is of one to whom the perpetrator is unaware of his familial relationship, making them equally tragic. The doubts the father has about his wife’s fidelity reveal a tension in the father-son relationship that can be traced to the particularly intense mother-son tie exemplified in the 24 examples of a son’s devotion to his parents, as described in the classic Confucian text of filial piety. This myth better serves as an exemplar of the Chinese family structure, which stresses a lifelong devotion to parents and discourages a breaking away to a newfound individuality that typifies Western European families.

Even without the myth’s being “discovered” by commentators of the early Chinese psychoanalytic scene, it is clear that, when the first psychoanalyst Bingham Dai [Dai Bingyue] began practising in China, his neo-Freudian training, coupled with his sensitivity to and pedagogical experience of the culture, predisposed him to a cultural framework that had departed from Freudian orthodoxy. Dai, a graduate of St. Johns University in Shanghai, had undergone training by Leon Saul and supervision by Karen Horney while studying for a doctorate in sociology in Chicago. He had been recommended for this by Harry Stack Sullivan, who, during Dai’s tenure, had approached him at a Rockefeller seminar in 1932. He returned to China in 1935 to take up a position at Peking Union Medical College, teaching medical psychology to Chinese doctors, setting up a small analytic training group, and seeing patients.

He worked at sensitising the doctors to forms of therapy based on a system of thought that departed from the Freudian frame of reference. Like his mentors, instead of seeing personality problems solely in terms of intra-psychic tensions, he sought to understand them in their social cultural contexts. While this orientation owed much to Sullivan’s influence, it had its origins for Dai in an earlier series of intellectual encounters that led him to reject the Christian teaching of the missionary college in which he had been educated and to embrace Confucianism. He was inspired in this move by his reading of a hugely influential text by Liang Shuming, Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies, published in 1922. Liang, a former Buddhist scholar who had turned to Confucianism, was a staunch conservative cultural critic in a period of significant cultural reform. His book spoke of the need to identify, cultivate and protect the essence of Chinese culture from the onslaught of newly imported Western scientific ideas. This was not in itself a new concern. While in the final decade of the Qing dynasty, prior to the formation of the Republic, there had been many calls for modernisation, a compromise had been

displayed in his concern for a unitary, and this struggle to achieve this was the battle of the Chinese modernists against the warring factions of the Republic. This is the battle of the Chinese modernists against the warring factions of the Republic.

显示了父子关系中的一种张力，而这种张力源自特别强烈的母子纽带。这种纽带正是儒家经典中所描述的二十四孝的范例之一。这个故事是中国家庭结构的更好例子：强调儿女对父母的终生投入，不鼓励脱离纽带而建立典型的西欧家庭中的个人性。

即使当时早期精神分析领域的知识分子没有“发现”这个故事，那么显然首度精神分析学家开始在中国行医的时候，他的新弗洛伊德式训练以及他对本土文化的敏感和教学经验都会给他建立一种容易与弗洛伊德正式派分道扬镳的文化框架。戴尔克是上海圣约翰大学的毕业生，后来在美国芝加哥政改社会学博士学位时曾接受埃里克·弗洛伊德的训练以及凯伦·霍妮的指导。在1932年的一次洛克菲勒研讨会上，哈里·斯图德，李利文找到他并推荐他接受此项训练。1935年时，戴尔克回国，并在北京协和医学院向中国医生讲授医学心理学。在那里建立了一个分析小组并接待病人。

他向学生们讲授了一些心理治疗的形势，而这些治疗形式基于一个脱离弗洛伊德派传统思想体系。与他的教师们一样，他没有单纯地从心理学角度去看待性格问题，而是从文化背景中去理解它们，一方面这是来自古利

sought in which Western learning could be imported only to the extent it did not devalue the essence of Chinese culture. Although many references to national essence were vague, there were differences about how best to preserve it, there was general agreement amongst scholars, poets and educators that it signified a return to Confucian ethical values, most notably the principle that, in the flux of life, all elements are bound together harmoniously and are best expressed in the concept of jen (benevolence). Reacting against the "modern condition," it was Liang's view that learning based solely on Western science would foster the critically rational mind, but this in turn would threaten, by critical devaluation, all values. The solution to this was that learning should proceed in contexts in which, not only intellectually, but moral improvement might be achieved.

How far Dai would have developed his psychoanalysis within this context remains unclear because he left in 1939 for America owing to the intensification of the Sino-Japanese war, bringing his program to a close. Psychoanalysis in China was not to be revived for another forty years.

A summing up

What are we to conclude from this very brief account of Asian encounters with Freud and orthodox psychoanalysis? In all cases of direct contact with Freud himself, his correspondents not only read and admired his work but, a priori, had begun working on their own transformations of his ideas. This is in sharp contrast to developments in the West where in Europe and elsewhere there had been an initial reception and acceptance of orthodoxy before revisions began to set in. This did not please Freud, but we know from the period of his life in which these Asian encounters began that he was already in some physical decline and that the psychoanalytic movement had, in any case, grown too big to be contained. More significantly Freud's tendency to see his discovery of the Oedipus complex as a universal phenomenon might have blinded him to the cultural variants his correspondents were keen to impress upon him, variants, it must be said, which need not have caused him too much concern since the general principles arising from his elaboration would universally apply—his formulation that paternal projections contribute to the formation of psychic structures (superego and the mechanism of defence) most notably.

If cultural myths have been found to support family structures out of which different psychodynamic constellations arise, the strong emphasis in Asian cultures generally on relationships taking priority over development of the individual self make the goal of realising potential and being able to accomplish change likely to be met in a relatively brief period. The potential for change is also found in the Chinese notion of the "five relationships", the relationships between individuals and the state, where change is expected to occur in these relationships and lead to societal change.

therapy different too. Where in the past the means of arriving at this goal have been seriously drawn into question, (38) there has been sufficient work in the past two decades, notably in the writings of Alan Roland, Sudhir Kakar and Ashis Nandy, dealing with India and Japan, to suggest that psychoanalysis in an Asian context is possible, and is practised, (39) albeit in culturally adapted modes, but, as elsewhere, it must contend not so much with revisions to orthodoxy as with rival forms of psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacologic practice, which currently dominate all cultures in which psychoanalytic ideas can be said to exist. (40)

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