Career Counseling Research and Practice in Taiwan

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This article (a) provides an overview of empirical studies regarding Western career theories applied in Taiwan, (b) discusses current career problems encountered in Taiwan, and (c) explores new perspectives for career counseling practice in Taiwan. Western career theories and important concepts are tested and modified empirically. A hypothetical life design model for increasing the meaning of life is proposed. Career counseling problems are then discussed within the educational system, special groups/adults, and employment/organizations in Taiwan. Implications for career counseling practice are discussed.

Keywords: career counseling, Chinese culture, life design, meaning of life, vocational behavior

Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa (“beautiful island”), is an island in East Asia. With limited natural resources, the country emphasizes human resources in its economic development. Therefore, career services and career counseling are very important for individual development. About 5 decades ago, career counseling in Taiwan started with vocational education for middle school students preparing to work after graduation. With the trends of a global economy, advanced technology, and a changing society, significant changes have occurred in the nature of work and the meaning of vocational education and career in Taiwan. In the 1970s, the meaning of work focused on earning a living. The main task of vocational guidance was simply to help graduates find a job. Now, a broadened meaning defines career as a lifelong process of learning and work. Career counseling, instead of vocational guidance, is therefore defined as a set of counseling services available for all individuals across the life span. Varieties of counseling activities need to be designed to assist individuals with the necessary skills to effectively manage career transitions and career development.

In this new era, career counseling cannot be viewed independently from the social context and public policy. With the progression of economics, technology, and social welfare in Taiwan, career counselors...
need to provide individuals with opportunities for career development. Counseling programs designed for individuals’ potential development should be based in theory, and the effects of those programs need to be examined through research. For effective career counseling in diverse societies, advanced research is needed to verify the applicability of existing theories in a different culture. A primary purpose of this article, therefore, is to review and summarize empirical tests of the validity of various career theory constructs for use in the Taiwanese context.

**Western Theories Applied in Chinese Society**

Several studies testing Western career theories are summarized in this section, including Holland’s hexagonal typology (Holland, 1973, 1985, 1994), Gati’s Hierarchical Model (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996), Lent’s social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent & Brown, 1996), and Swanson and Tokar’s (1991) study on career barriers. We also discuss other theories, including the concepts of career adaptability and life design (Savickas, 1997), in relation to how they are recently applied indigenously to develop programs appropriate for Chinese people in Taiwan. In general, most of these theories were verified, but they require certain modification and further examination for the Chinese context.

**Holland’s Hexagonal Typology Versus Gati’s Hierarchical Model**

Holland’s (1973, 1985, 1994) hexagonal typology has been examined in many countries. The six Holland personality types are Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (often referred to as RIASEC). The types that are closer to each other on the hexagon are more alike than the types are that farther apart (Einarsdóttir, Rounds, Ægisdóttir, & Gerstein, 2002). Results of the studies in Taiwan have supported the generalizability of the hexagonal structure but with some modification (Tien, 1996, 2009). Realistic and Investigative types are closer to each other, whereas Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional types are closer to one another.

An alternative RIASEC interest structure model is Gati’s Hierarchical Model of vocational interests (Gati et al., 1996), in which Realistic and Investigative are in one group, Artistic and Social belong to the second group, and Enterprising and Conventional belong to the third group. Gati’s model was indicated to be a better model for Taiwanese college students (Tien, 1996) because Gati’s classification system corresponds to the classification system conducted for the College Entrance Examination in Taiwan, in which high school students choose from four groups of college majors before they enter college or university. The first group includes majors in arts, education, social work, language, law school, business management, political science, economics, and accounting. The second group includes majors in engineering, chemistry, math, or physics. The third group includes majors in medicine, pharmacy, and nursing. The fourth group includes majors in biology and food and nutrition. The first group corresponds to Gati’s Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional groups. The second, third, and fourth groups correspond to Gati’s first pair, Realistic and Investigative. Further studies are needed.
to verify other constructs, such as the relationship between congruence and degree of college learning satisfaction. Programs facilitating students’ potentials and empowering them to fit in the college or change themselves for future work adjustment are also needed.

**SCCT, Career Barriers, and the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ)**

The SCCT (Lent & Brown, 1996) comprises three parts: interest, choice behavior, and performance. The first part, interest, was supported only for Artistic and Social types for female high school students (Tien, 2003). It is possible that this model was useful for girls in specific fields because self-efficacy in these particular fields would result in their interests and choice behavior in these fields. The second part, choice behavior, means that career-related interests might foster particular educational and occupational choice goals. The third part, performance, means that performance attainments such as successes or failures may provide valuable feedback that can help to revise or confirm choices. The second and third parts are not empirically verified in Taiwan yet.

Regarding the role of career barriers in the SCCT, the specific nature of career barrier mediation effects varied somewhat across the RIASEC types. The role of career barriers in the SCCT was not as important as we expected in Chinese culture. Career self-efficacy was more important than barriers in predicting high school students’ career choice behavior. Similar to a study based on a college student sample (Lent et al., 2002), Tien’s (2003) study showed that career barriers perceived by high school students related only very weakly to choice behavior. The only significant relationship is for Artistic-type female students; the more barriers they perceive, the less chances for them to choose Type A jobs ($r = -.26, p < .10$).

A hierarchical model of career barriers (Swanson & Tokar, 1991) was verified and showed gender differences. A Chinese version of the Career Barriers Inventory (CCBI; Tien, 1998a, 1998b) was developed. The results of item analyses and reliability and validity tests revealed that the CCBI was an applicable instrument for understanding college students’ perceptions of career-related barriers in a Chinese culture. Of concern to counselors was the relationship between career barriers and congruence of choice behavior. To further examine the content of career barriers, we extracted five core categories of career-related barriers: personal background, work environment, psychological factors, family–social interaction, and gender–social interaction factors. We found that counselors can help the client become aware of these types of barriers and develop their potentials in their career development. In addition, we found that female students perceived more barriers from social interaction activities such as in their marriage and with in-laws, whereas male students perceived more barriers from background variables such as military service (Tien, 1999).

For counseling practitioners, the CDDQ (Gati et al., 1996) has the potential to serve as a diagnostic instrument in career counseling. The reliability and construct validity of the Chinese version of the CDDQ were good and could be applied for further research and counseling practice as well (Tien, 2005). The three-group classification system for career decision-making difficulties was generally supported by the data.
in Tien’s (2005) study. The three groups of career difficulties were renamed as Readiness, Information, and Conflicts.

**Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)**

The CAAS (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) consists of four subscales, each with six items, which measure concern, control, curiosity, and confidence as psychosocial resources for managing occupational transitions, developmental tasks, and work traumas. Internal consistency estimates for the subscale scores and total scores were excellent. The factor structure was quite similar to the one computed for combined data from 13 countries. The CAAS–Taiwan Form (Tien, Wang, Chu, & Huang, 2012) is identical to the International Form 2.0 and is appropriate for people in Taiwan. Based on the results, the CAAS–Taiwan Form appears ready for use by researchers and practitioners who wish to measure adaptability resources among adults (Tien et al., 2012).

**Work–Family Conflict, Accommodation, and Life Satisfaction**

In traditional Chinese society, individuals are encouraged to sacrifice self and contribute to the group. For women, especially after they marry, multiple role conflict becomes an important issue because the dual-earner family is a common family construct today (Tien, 2006). Women have to put in more effort and energy to earn prestige in traditionally male-dominated professions while also taking responsibility for their children’s health and psychological development. It is obvious that work–family conflicts and coping strategies for women are important issues for discussion. Additionally, well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction are important for an individual’s mental health.

**A Path Model**

In recent years, positive psychology has been gaining popularity in Taiwan. Variables such as strength-based approach, mindfulness, personal growth initiative, life satisfaction, and well-being are drawing researchers’ attention. Tien and Wang (2015) tested a hypothetical path model of work–family conflict, accommodation, and life satisfaction in a sample of school teachers. The results of an AMOS analysis indicated that the bidirectional conflicts among family and work influenced each other. Both family and work were mediated by coping efficacy and influenced an individual’s subjective well-being/personal growth initiative and happiness/life satisfaction (see Figure 1). The conflicts between family and work also influenced personal growth and life satisfaction directly. The hypothesized model was supported by the AMOS results ($\chi^2 = 24.60$, $p = .039$; normed fit index = .999; relative fit index = .977; comparative fit index = .999).

The hypothesized path model for predicting school teachers’ personal growth and life satisfaction was supported (Tien & Wang, 2015). Family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict can predict one’s informal work accommodation to family and then predict one’s life satisfaction and personal growth initiation. Work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict can also predict an individual’s life satisfaction and personal growth initiation directly and negatively. The more conflict individuals
perceive, the less satisfied they are and the less growth initiative they experience. However, informative work accommodation to family can be a moderator between conflicts and satisfaction. It positively influenced the teachers’ perceived satisfaction and personal growth in Tien and Wang’s (2015) study.

**Measuring Work–Family Conflict, Accommodation, and Life Satisfaction**

Many inventories and measures have been developed in Taiwan in the past 30 years for application in different settings, such as (a) the school system (e.g., interest, values, aptitude, career beliefs, career self-efficacy, career adaptability); (b) community services (e.g., mental health, life satisfaction); and (c) employment assistant programs (e.g., stress coping, work–family conflict, job satisfaction). Measures are needed to help professional counselors and psychologists working in school systems increase their self-awareness, especially inventories based on the local cultural context. To evaluate the work–family conflict, accommodation, and life satisfaction in our study, we translated the following scales developed in Western countries; all show good validity and reliability with participants in Taiwan.

**Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS).** The PGIS (Robitschek, 1998) consists of nine items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 6 (definitely agree). Total scores can range from 6 to 54. Higher scores indicate higher levels of personal growth initiative. The scale was applied to measure subjective well-being perceived by individuals. When applied in Taiwan, the internal consistency was .87 based on a sample of 217 school teachers (Tien & Wang, 2008).

**Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS).** The SWLS was developed by Die- ner, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). The scale consists of five items measuring satisfaction with life on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The translated Chinese version (Tien & Wang, 2008) consists of the same five items. Reliability coefficient with the sample of 217 teachers was .90 in Tien and Wang’s (2008) study. This scale has been applied in many countries with different languages; thus, the five items are popular and have good validity for measuring subjective
well-being. It was applied to measure life satisfaction perceived by teachers in Tien and Wang’s study.

Informal Work Accommodations to Family (IWAF) scale. The IWAF (Behson, 2002) scale includes items measuring 16 behaviors on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (very often). Tien and Wang (2008) revised the items to make them culturally appropriate for teachers in Taiwan. The final Chinese version included eight items. The internal consistency was .83 based on the sample of 217 teachers. This scale was applied to measure coping efficacy between work and family.

Work-to-Family Conflict Scale (WTFCS) and Family-to-Work Conflict Scale (FTWCS). The WTFCS and FTWCS were developed by Huang (2005), with each scale consisting of nine items. The internal consistent reliability was .93 based on the sample of 371 college professors/instructors in Huang’s study. The reliability coefficient was .89 for the WTFCS and .89 for the FTWCS based on 217 teachers. For the test of validity indexes, Tien and Wang (2008) invited three professional scholars in career counseling to judge the content and wording of all items in each scale. The results indicated good qualities for all items in those scales.

The RAISE-Up Model

Tien et al. (2015) proposed a hypothetical model for measuring career life meaning. Because life design (Savickas et al., 2009) is a popular and important contemporary idea, counselors need to help individuals think about the meaning of life, especially for adults over 50 years of age. Tien and colleagues interviewed 12 middle school teachers. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed by grounded theory. The results indicated five steps for helping middle-age clients explore meaning and purpose in their life-careers: (a) Relationship establishment; (b) Awareness of life theme; (c) Insight for life meaning; (d) Strength-focused development; and (e) Extend to future planning. Tien et al. called it the RAISE-Up Model (see Figure 2).
Tien et al. (2015) elaborated on this model and tested its effectiveness by using an experimental design with 40 adult participants. It was predicted that this model would help increase adults’ perception of career uncertainty, complexity, and unpredictable change. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups: the RAISE-up group and the dream-work group. Results of an analysis of covariance indicated that both RAISE-up and dream work increased the adults’ personal growth initiative and life satisfaction (Tien et al., 2015). We believe that this model is appropriate not only for adults but also for adolescents. More research for this model is needed in the future.

Current Problems Encountered by Career Counselors in Taiwan

Problems in the Educational System
Taiwan’s new policy of a 12-year compulsory education began in 2014. Career education is emphasized to help students explore self and the world of work. In the past, most students in Taiwan were mainly encouraged to perform well at various achievement tests to get into excellent high schools and universities. Those who performed well often spent too much time studying and not enough time exploring the self or the world of work.

In elementary schools in Taiwan, most teachers, as well as principals and administrators, believe that children are too young for career counseling. They believe that career guidance is not necessary in elementary school because children do not have to work. In their view, it is more important for elementary school children to perform well behaviorally and academically to get into junior high. Therefore, career counseling seems to be overlooked by elementary school educators.

There are two categories of junior high school students in Taiwan: those who prepare to go to senior high school and those planning for vocational technological school. Students who perform well and prepare to go to senior high school study hard and take tests. There are no activities for them to explore important questions such as “Who am I?” and “What am I going to do?” They also do not have any chance to realize the reality of the world of work. The students who cannot get into senior high school might choose a vocational technological school. Most of the time, boys will choose industrial schools and girls will choose commercial or home economic fields. Students who do not prepare for further education are provided with cooperative education and do what they learned after they graduate. They are not provided with enough opportunities and information to explore personal traits/ strength or the work world before they enter the job market.

For senior high school students in Taiwan, the academic competition is even more intense. All students have to choose either natural science or social science as their study focus at the end of the 1st year. Before they start college, they need to decide which department to enroll in, although they do have a chance to change their major or choose double majors. Knowledge and information on colleges, as well as personal interests, values, and aptitude, are all important factors in the choice of major. However, most of the students choose college majors according
to the scores they obtain in the College Entrance Examination, and only those who score high on the exam have the opportunity to choose their majors. A new policy of a 12-year compulsory education in 2014 required high school students to choose at least a one-credit career course. In that course, guidance counselors help students explore the self and increase their knowledge about careers and the world of work, including the college majors.

For students in colleges and universities, career counseling becomes important. Except for students preparing for graduate studies and those who go to military service, almost all of the students in Taiwan choose to enter the job market after they graduate college. Therefore, job-seeking skills seem to be the most important part of career counseling. In fact, curriculum and training programs in particular departments provide college students with knowledge and skills necessary for them to perform well in their future work. What the counseling center can do is to provide students with opportunities to explore themselves more deeply. Therefore, more professional counselors are needed to provide college students with professional services. Full-time professional counselors are now available to help students with personal problems. Many career concepts are also immersed in regular courses, and students are given the opportunity think about their future.

Facilities and faculties are two important factors that influence the practice work of career counseling. The Taiwanese government has made an effort to provide financial aid for counseling facilities. However, it is more important to have professionally trained school counselors than to have facilities to provide effective counseling. Counseling scholars and practitioners should collaborate in facilitating the students’ career development. Training program and supervision would be the new direction for career professional development. The Taiwan Career Development and Consultation Association (2015) developed a series of training programs consisting of 140-hour training courses, including 96 hours of class work, 32 hours practicum, and 12 hours supervision. The training content includes the topics of career theories, quantitative and qualitative assessment, helping skills, cultural issues and practice on career counseling, and ethical and legal issues on career counseling. It would be a good model for future career training in Taiwan and the Chinese context.

Problems for Special Groups and Adults
Career concerns for adults include job transitions; the secondary specialty/skills training for those who cannot find a job that fits what they have learned; psychological and physical burnout; rehabilitation or transition after serious accidents; and special services for workers who are laid off, soldiers, individuals with disabilities, women, retirees, and older workers. To provide career counseling for these groups of adults, the counselor should always adopt three important principles—knowing self, knowing the world of work, and true reasoning—while paying attention to individual uniqueness. To understand individual behavior, it is necessary to understand the effects of an individual’s past and present contexts in the present perceptions of events, possibilities, or characteristic or
life-career story. These perceptions may influence the individual’s career decision-making behavior.

Laid-off workers not only lose a job but also come to question and doubt the meaning of life. Counselors should provide special services to help such workers create a new self. For women, one major concern is the conflict between home and work. Barriers such as gender stereotype, social expectation, and relocation may also narrow their occupational choices. For professional soldiers, who are only in their 40s when they retire, there seem to be no specific services for their transition from the military to the regular world of work. Physical limitations may constrain persons with disabilities to a narrow range of occupations. How to broaden their view of self and provide them with sufficient information in the world of work is important.

Problems in Organizations

Most private organizations have their own policies and educational training systems. Some employers put more emphasis on employees’ personal growth because they believe that the employees’ growth can contribute to the company’s growth. However, most employers focus on the growth of the company rather than the employees. Generally, problems that occur in organizations include the following three aspects: (a) Companies do not have professionally trained counselors, (b) employers neglect employees’ career development, and (c) employees do not realize the importance of career development.

In most organizations, employees’ career problems are completely neglected by employers. Even if some employers notice psychological problems encountered by employees, they might not hire professionally trained counselors to deal with those problems. If employers wish to place more emphasis on humanistic ideas in their personnel management, they should select and hire professional counselors and other helping professionals in their organizations.

Primary prevention/mental health lectures are the most popular way to deliver services. In addition, psychological testing has been used for the purpose of screening and placement of employees. However, there are many ethical issues that need to be considered when psychological tests are used.

Employment relationship is another important issue. There is a fine balance between the needs of the company and the needs of an employee. The employee’s career objectives should be consistent with the goals set by the company, and the company’s development should be the concern not only of employers but also of employees. In addition, how to define career success and career achievement is an important issue in the area of career counseling.

Implications for Practitioners

The demographic composition as well as the educational system in Taiwan is changing markedly. The government, school systems, and private enterprises need to be active in promoting a scheme to facilitate individual career development. Many studies reviewed in this article were either outcome research or correlation studies in which most of
the inventories were constructed for the purpose of research instead of practice. For a counseling practitioner, career assessments offer a key resource for helping students explore self and develop their career plans. It is important for school counselors in Taiwan to have available inventories, scales, and other assessment tools that are based on their own culture as well as on sound theories.

Counselors also need to become aware of and knowledgeable about the profound changes that are occurring in the context within which career planning is done. New techniques for career counseling also need to be developed. For example, information could be provided through the Internet and community counseling centers. Certainly, the cost–benefit effects must be taken into consideration.

**Career Education**

Compulsory education should provide the foundations for lifelong career development. More specifically, the curriculum should include teaching students self-awareness, opportunity awareness, and decision learning. For self-awareness, the students are provided with opportunities to understand distinctive characteristics such as abilities, skills, and attitudes. For opportunity awareness, the students are taught to understand the world of work. For decision learning, the students are taught general decision-making skills. In addition, all educational provision should provide regular opportunities for students to relate what they are learning to the wider society and to their future career development.

We believe that career counseling has been overlooked for many years in Taiwan’s educational system. One important reason is the overemphasis on intellectual learning. The competitive grading system for intellectual learning stresses judging over learning. It adversely affects teachers by turning them into students’ opponents, justifying inadequate teaching methods, trivializing course content, encouraging evaluation methods that misdirect and inhibit student learning, and rewarding teachers for punishing students. Both teachers and parents emphasize students’ study performance rather than their behaviors or moral and value development, which are closely related to career development. Although similar problems have occurred in the United States (Krumboltz, 1996), we believe that the problems are even more serious in Taiwan.

The concept of career counseling should be broadened to include self-exploration and world-of-work exploration instead of the narrower job-placement concept now in place in Taiwan. Attention should also be paid to school dropouts and joblessness. Individuals need services on both job-seeking skills and self-exploration. Although students in Taiwan have the opportunity to receive technical training as their 10th year of compulsory education, this training is only limited to their time in school. The government needs to put more effort on school-to-work transition to help students get into the workforce.

**Special Populations**

Postschool education and in-service training are very important for young adults, especially for those who might not be well prepared to enter the job market. For many, their work might not even relate to what they learned in school. Some students cannot major in the learning areas they
like because of their scores in the College Entrance Examination. Other students may not even know what they like because they have always been taught to focus on studying hard and getting into college; career planning and career exploration were sacrificed in favor of education. It is important that further and higher education be expanded so that young adults can obtain postschool training and qualifications.

More emphasis also needs to be placed on the process of obtaining job-related competence, especially for individuals with disabilities and other minorities, such as new immigrants and Taiwan’s indigenous people in the cities. To provide these special groups with effective counseling, it is necessary to have collaboration from diverse professionals, for example, counseling, psychology, social welfare, social work, special education, and even anthropology. With reasonable recognition from a variety of fields, these special populations can be given deserved opportunities for career exploration.

In addition to job-related competence, both internal and external barriers are also important topics for discussion in the counseling process. When an individual seeks help from a career counselor, it is important to explore his or her personal characteristics, as well as the external barriers that influence the individual’s vocational choice behaviors. These are all determining factors of how the individual views current social or occupational expectations and opportunities for personal choice.

**Employment Relationship**

Efforts need to be made in the negotiation of the mutual expectations between employer and employee. The contract they sign is a kind of psychological contract (Argyris, 1960) instead of behavioral contract. The congruence between an individual’s personal life and the demands of life in an organization would influence the individual’s stability in that organization, as well as the achievement and satisfaction perceived by the individual.

With regard to the evaluation of employees, whereas evaluation at the team level depends on effective team performance, evaluation at the individual level requires new definitions of competence and standards of performance. The employees should be given the opportunity to review where they are in their career and where they are going. Employees can develop their own training needs and should take the primary responsibility for acquiring the skills they need and keep them up to date. Therefore, the employers need to support and encourage the employees’ efforts rather than initiate and direct activities.

**Conclusion**

During the 20th century, career theories and techniques were based mainly on person–environment fit psychology. Today, the social and cultural contexts that engulf counselors’ daily work are critically important to attend to in counseling. Career behavior is the interaction between complex factors such as psychological dynamics, shifts in occupations, change of education policy, and cultural transition. Individuals in Taiwan, immersed in a collectivistic culture, still need
to have the opportunities to be aware of their personal needs and the relationship between their needs and their obligation related to the family and society in order to develop their own career meanings. Therefore, resource integration from different professionals such as professional counselors, clinical/counseling psychologists, social workers, and doctors are necessary to facilitate individual career development in the new era.

References


