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Chi Kung Facilitates Integral Growth:

An Empirical Investigation

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Chi Kung Facilitates Integral Growth: An Empirical Investigation

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Swiss cultural philosopher Jean Gebser (1949/1986) proposed a theory of the evolutionary development of *structures of consciousness* that describes the common ways people living in different periods of history interpreted reality and constructed their worldviews. These included four major structures corresponding to four historical epochs, an *archaic*, *magic*, *mythic*, and *mental* structure which remains dominant today. Citing changes in art, literature, and scientific during the 20th century, Gebser also proposed the emergence of a forthcoming fifth structure, that he termed *integral consciousness*.

The transitions from each structure to the next, which Gebser termed *mutations*, do not imply the replacement of previous structures. Rather, as Feuerstein (1987) and Combs (2002) note, there is a sense of increasing complexity with each successive new mutation, in which a structure comes to dominate the earlier ones. Thus, the modern human, operating predominantly in the mental structure of consciousness, continues to experience the world to some degree through the older structures as well. These structures are described elsewhere, and will not be reviewed here (Combs, 2002; Gebser, 1949/1986; Feuerstein, 1987; Wilber, 1981).

The *integral* structure of consciousness, however, incorporates a balanced synthesis of all four earlier structures, and was regarded by Gebser as the highest potential for human experience. Although Gebser focused mostly on the emergence of integral consciousness in terms of its wide occurrence across the human species, late in his life he came to regard meditation and other spiritual practices valuable for the cultivation of integral consciousness (Combs, 2002). Gebser was particularly fond of Taoist thought, acknowledging the play of all structures in Taoist practices and philosophy (Combs, 2002; Gebser, 2000).

This study was designed to detect the growth of the integral structure of consciousness in long-term practioners of *Sundo*, a holistic Chi Kung discipline that involves both physical and mental practices as well as the cultivation of character (Kim, 1998, 2000). Such growth might manifest itself as growth in the archaic, magical, mythic and mental structures said to come into balance in integral consciousness.

Method

Participants

These were 152 Sundo practitioners, 67 male and 85 female, between 26 and 65

years of age ($M = 45$ yrs). They were assigned to three skill levels based on how long they had practiced Sundo Chi Kung: 42 were *novice* (1 year or less), 56 were *intermediate* (1 to 5 years), and 56 were *advanced* (5 or more years).

Materials and Procedure

Each participant completed a set of 15 Likert scale items. These included three sets of five items each, written on the basis of face validity to represent each of the three structures of consciousness, the magic, mythic, and mental. The archaic structure was not included because it is not sufficiently well understood to include. The Likert items are shown in the Appendix, but examples include: "I experience telepathy or other psi phenomenon" for the magic structure, "Dreams are an important part of my life" for the mythic structure, and "I always analyze things carefully" for the mental structure. The order of the items was systematically rotated between the three structures of consciousness, and the direction was alternated with every other item in reverse presentation.

Each Likert scale item used a straight line in place of the usual four or five point division, on which the participant was asked to make a slash mark to indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement with the item, thus yielding measures that could be treated as continuous variables in the statistical analysis (Combs, Winkler, & Daley, 1994).

Results

The resulting means and standard deviations for the Likert items are shown in Table 1. There it can be seen that mean scores for all three structures of consciousness increased from the novices through the intermediate level, and on to the advanced practitioners, accompanied by small but consistent decreases in the SDs. Overall, the means increased in value, becoming more similar for the three structures of consciousness with more increasing length of practice.

Table 1. Means and SDs for Likert items.

		Magic	Mythic	Mental
Novice	Mean	4.66	6.76	6.41
	SD	2.87	2.61	2.36
Intermediate	Mean	6.03	7.14	6.69
	SD	2.78	2.49	2.19
Advanced	Mean	6.98	7.24	7.32

SD	2.34	2.25	1.66
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A detailed examination of the results disclosed that the statistical significance of the increases in all five magical consciousness Likert items was beyond the 0.002 level across the three levels of practice, as disclosed by one-way ANOVAs. On the other hand, only one of the mythic and one of the mental consciousness items increased significantly, both at beyond the 0.001 level. Interestingly, however, overall ANOVAs for these two structures did not indicate their increases to be significant.

Discussion

The clearest overall finding was that the magical structure of consciousness seemed to increase in influence across the three levels of practice while, for the most part, the mythic and mental did not. At the same time, while we have no absolute calibration on the value of these Likert scale items, it is at least interesting to note that all three structures of consciousness shift toward similar values with increasing practice. These facts, taken together, are consistent with the initial suggestion that Taoist practice leads toward the developed of an integral structure of consciousness in which all three of these structures, as well as the yet unmeasured archaic structure, come into mutual balance.

This fact that the greatest change was seen in the magic structure of consciousness is perhaps not surprising, considering that it is the oldest of the three structures, its ascendance is the farthest in the past, and it is the most inimical to today's dominant mental structure. Bringing it into balance with the other structures is a notable achievement.

Interestingly, this single mythic item that increased significantly was also the one that embodies the most central feather of mythic consciousness, "My life is part of a larger living narrative," indicating an awareness of life as an ongoing story or narrative. Gebser (1949/1986) believed that the initial emergence of this structure involved storytelling, poetry, and epic myths. To be aware of these myths, one would see oneself as part of a larger narrative, one involving many individual stories, for example, of people, gods, and goddesses. Altogether, they these form a living myth, or narrative, of an individual's life.

The single statement that increased significantly in value for the mental structure was, "I have a clear philosophy for my life." This was perhaps not surprising, and also not especially illuminating, because it essentially mirrors the obvious fact that the long-term practitioners have strongly invested in the Sundo practice and philosophy.

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Appendix: Likert items.

MAGIC STRUCTURE

1. I experience meaningful coincidences (synchronicities)
2. I am aware of subtle energies in my body
3. I experience telepathy or other psi phenomenon
4. Events in my life seem miraculous
5. I have a sense of oneness with the universe

MYTHIC STRUCTURE

1. Dreams are important part of my life
2. My life is an continuously unfolding story
3. I value my imagination
4. My life is part of a larger living narrative
5. I enjoy a good story

MENTAL STRUCTURE

1. I tend to make rational choices
2. I always analyze things carefully
3. I have a clear mind
4. I have a clear philosophy for my life

5. I tend to think decisions through carefully

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