Article

Tillich and *Laozi*: Revealing the Existential and Religious Depth of Experiences of Migration

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Journal of Interreligious Studies
July 2024, Issue 42, 63-81
ISSN 2380-8187
www.irstudies.org

Abstract

At the heart of migration live multifold tensions of leaving and arriving, of homelands and host countries, grief and loss as well as strength and resilience, of identities, traditions, belongings as well as growth, potentials, and adventures. The stories of migration are, in essence, stories of a constant negotiation between being and becoming. In this article, I characterize the existential and religious themes in migration stories through Christian philosophical theologian Paul Tillich's framework of the polar structure of reality and the Daoist dialectical thinking of *Laozi* in the *Daodejing*. While both acknowledge contradictions as principles of human existence, they are distinct in making meanings of the contradictory world we call life. Tillich appears to suggest that we live anxiously in tension, being pulled painfully in different directions; however, *Laozi* approaches tension with an emphasis on acceptance, living comfortably with it. Contextualizing such findings within the multicultural orientation framework (MCO), attention is given to the roles of culturally embedded beliefs and values in meaning-making.

Keywords

Migration, Paul Tillich, Laozi, Daodejing, Daoism, Tension, Contradiction, Comparative Theology, Therapeutic Intervention, Multicultural Orientation Framework

Psychoanalyst Salman Akhtar believes that the impact of migration extends beyond the transformation of individual identity and involves changes in the realm of one's relationship with other humans, animals, and nonhuman surroundings.[1] To list a few, migration influences a ubiquitous area of human experience: social relationships, family dynamics, professional pursuits, personality development, intergenerational issues, and, ultimately, one's understanding of the self, the other, and the world. It goes beyond daily life and influences one's fundamental being in this world. Indeed, the journey of migration involves multifaceted tensions of negotiating leaving

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[1] Salman Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation: Mourning, Adaptation, and the Next Generation* (Lanham, Maryland: Jason Aronson, Inc., 2010), 8.

and arriving, aloneness and belonging, and grief and resilience. The stories of the migrants are, in essence, stories of constantly negotiating being and becoming.

It is only plausible to consider migration as accompanied by deep personal reflections, which, according to existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom, intensify the confrontation with ultimate concerns—the deep structures and givens of existence.[2] Healing the ruptures, trauma, and other forms of challenges related to migration involves entering a deeper existential terrain and constructing transformed meaning. To explore deeply, in an existential sense, goes beyond the everyday world. Interpreting the complex lived experience of migration that influences one's social, psychological, existential, and religious lives calls for an interdisciplinary approach. Recent literature in the mental health field has made efforts to extend beyond the boundaries of traditional social sciences research to increasingly acknowledge the importance of spiritual and religious dynamics in therapeutic intervention. Empirical research has demonstrated that many psychotherapy clients hold important spiritual and religious beliefs and prefer to have these beliefs considered as part of the therapeutic process.[3] Furthermore, evidence also suggests that such factors can often be positively associated with mental health.[4]

A growing number of psychologists of religion have recognized the essential role of religion in meaning-making and its impact on people's psychological functioning. Meaning systems "are broad frameworks through which people attend to and perceive stimuli; organize their behavior; conceptualize themselves, others, and interpersonal relationships; remember their past; and imagine and anticipate their future."[5] When interpreted appropriately, religious elements can positively shape one's understanding of the self and the world around them. Nevertheless, conceptualizations of migration's existential and religious significance remain thin and reductive. Emerging literature in this field has focused considerable attention on how to incorporate certain religious and spiritual practices (for example, yoga and meditation) in treatments.[6] Yet beliefs in some communities that bear theological depth (for example, the concept of fate/heavenly command 命 in the Chinese context) are bracketed under "culture"[7] and often understood as "superstitious."[8] Such discussion neglects the deep and grounding thickness and wisdom of specific spiritual traditions and can cause helping professionals to provide existentially devoid care. Responding to these issues, this article extends the direction of recent psychological studies of religious and theological factors by conducting a more robust interdisciplinary analysis. It does so in several new ways.

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[2] Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*. (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 11.
[3] Kevin A. Harris, Brooke E. Randolph, and Timothy D. Gordon, "What Do Clients Want? Assessing Spiritual Needs in Counseling: A Literature Review," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice (Washington, D.C.)* 3, no. 4 (2016): 250–75.
[4] Laura E. Captari et al., "Integrating Positive Psychology, Religion/Spirituality, and a Virtue Focus Within Culturally Responsive Mental Healthcare," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, ed. Edward B. Davis, Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Sarah A. Schnitker (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 413–28; Harold G. Koenig, *Religion and Mental Health: Research and Clinical Applications* (Academic Press, 2018).
[5] Raymond F. Paloutzian, "Psychology of Religion in Global Perspective: Logic, Approach, Concepts," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 27, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 7.
[6]Jamie D. Aten, Mark R. McMinn, and Everett L. Worthington, *Spiritually Oriented Interventions for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Washington, D.C., Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011).
[7] Taryn N. Tang and Keith Oatley, "Belief in Common Fate and Psychological Well-Being among Chinese Immigrant Women," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 12, no. 4 (December 2009): 274–84.
[8] Jia Li, Ling Xu, and Iris Chi, "Challenges and Resilience Related to Aging in the United States among Older Chinese Immigrants," *Aging & Mental Health* 22, no. 12 (December 2018): 1548–55.

Firstly, this article starts with the lived experience of migration and how it impacts the human psyche from a psychodynamic perspective. Although the pre- and post-migration framework helps clinicians conceptualize their migrant clients' experiences, it implies a rather linear progression in migration. In reality, many migrant persons and communities must negotiate dynamic elements at any moment: between the past and present, homeland and host country, loss, grief, trauma as well as strength, resilience, and growth. Therefore, this article adds to the current conceptualization of migration by interpreting migrants' deep existential realities of living in multi-layered tensions through Christian theologian Paul Tillich's polar structure of reality. Within this framework, I illustrate how tensions in migration, when considered in light of the polarized human condition, are fundamental elements of life. Tillich's complex framework of polarities gives language to the intricacy of migration, capturing its opposing yet dynamic conditions. However, depending on their background and dispositions (cultural, spiritual, religious, and so on), people make sense of life's tension differently. Accordingly, I consider how the *Daodejing,* a Daoist classic attributed to the legendary Laozi, resonates with Tillich and acknowledges tensions and contradictions as principles of human existence while teasing out a fundamental departure between the two.

The authorship of the *Daodejing* is debated. While the text is traditionally attributed to a sage figure named Laozi (or Lao Dan, Li Er) in the Pre-Qin and Han periods, others are more skeptical of the idea and maintain that the *Daodejing* is "an edited accumulation of fragments and bits drawn from a wide variety of sources."[9] For this paper, *Laozi* refers to the ancient text, also known as *Daodejing*, not Laozi, the person. Due to the difficulties and confusions raised by translations between ancient Chinese texts and contemporary Chinese language as well as between Chinese language and English, I draw from eight different translated works based on what I view as most appropriate for each verse cited in this article.[10]

When it comes to making meaning of the contradictory world, Tillich suggests that we live anxiously *in* tension, being pulled painfully to different directions; however, *Laozi* accepts it with much ease, living comfortably *with* tension. Bringing *Laozi* into conversation with Tillich enriches our interpretation of migration's existential polarities, signaling different ways to make meaning of one's story. Therefore, this comparison has implications for clinical and therapeutic interventions for migrant populations. In the last section, I explore an example of how the above comparative theological analysis of migration may be integrated into practical therapeutic settings. Specifically, the multicultural orientation framework (MCO) is utilized to facilitate spiritually integrated and culturally sensitive care for migrant persons and communities.

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[9] Daniel Sarafinas, "The Hierarchy of Authorship in the Hermeneutics of the Daodejing," *Religions* 13, no.5 (2022): 433.

[10] B. Boisen, comp., *Lao Tzu's Tao-Teh-Ching: A Parallel Translation Collection*. (Boston: Gnomad Publishing. 1996), https://www.bu.edu/religion/files/pdf/Tao_Teh_Ching_Translations.pdf. These eight sources are: Wing-tsit Chan, trans. & ed., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); Thomas Cleary, trans. & ed., *The Essential Tao* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991); Gia-fu Feng and Jane English, trans., *Lao Tsu: Tao Te Ching* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Roberts Henricks, trans., *Te-Tao Ching* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993); D.C. Lau, trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963); Yutang Lin, trans., *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York: Random House, 1955); Arthur Waley, trans., *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958); John C.H. Wu, trans., *Tao Teh Ching* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989).

Inevitably, the choice to compare Tillich and *Laozi* is autobiographical, which I will disclose later. However, the comparative analysis between the two is invaluable beyond my own story seeking understanding. Tillich and *Laozi*, in their shared recognition of life's tension and contradiction across time, space, and culture, both grapple with questions of ultimacy and provide different approaches to face such a human condition. The comparative analysis is not only compatible but also necessary. Furthermore, migration is a boundaries-crossing journey, and understanding its existential depth is incomplete without a comparative theological analysis cross-culturally. That said, though this comparison emerges from the migration context, its insights illuminate different pathways to make meaning of a fundamental element of human existence—tension and contradictions.

Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this interdisciplinary work is manifold, weaving together the psychodynamics of migration, comparative theological analysis, and therapeutic interventions in practical settings. It should be noted this is first a practical theology project in its emphasis on the significance of a particular experience. Methodologically, practical theological reflection begins with the concrete and local activities of daily life.[11] In other words, the starting point of this paper is the lived experience of migration. In interpreting the fragments and themes of migration through critical theological reflection, this paper complexifies the linear understanding of migration, exacerbating the experience of living in tension. More specifically, with psychological theories and comparative theological analysis, the paper performs how one makes meanings of the lived experience of migration, the contradictory world, and one's place within it. Beginning with a thick description of migration experiences through a theological lens, it does not try to fit migration experiences into theories (that is, deductive reasoning). Rather, it moves from experiences to conceptualization (that is, inductive reasoning). Therefore, this project, first and foremost, speaks to those who have lived for an extended time outside their homelands, wrestling with changing identities and seeking to make sense of their journey. It is neither the theological assumptions nor my subjective truth that I hope readers will take away; rather, I wish to communicate a process of finding language and clarifying one's lived experience through dialoguing among different religious traditions and disciplines. Then, as a practical theological inquiry, this article is concerned with how theological knowledge may change and shape practices and transform people's lives. Therefore, this work also addresses helping professionals (for example, therapists and religious leaders) and reflects what spiritually integrated and culturally sensitive care for migrant populations could look like. In addition, tension and the often-contradictory reality are not limited to migrants. Young adults who have grown out of their family members' political views and find themselves at the holiday dinner table and parents who must attune to their young children and have their own needs as individuals are just a few examples of how tension shows itself in life. It is my hope that people attentive to such realities will also find this paper meaningful.

In addition, the project naturally benefits from and contributes to the field of comparative theology. Firstly, the act of comparison undergirds migrants' daily experiences, not just their

[11] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Newark, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011), 7.

theology: language, customs, values, culture, socio-political environment, food, etc. Certain levels of comparison are always underway, consciously and unconsciously. Then, migrants' spiritual and religious lives often change and evolve throughout their journey. For some, migration opens the opportunity to encounter other religious and spiritual traditions, enriching their self-understanding through an implicit process of comparative theological learning.

For Catherine Cornille, comparative theology may result in various types of learning: intensification, rectification, recovery, reinterpretation, appropriation by, or reaffirmation of one's own home tradition.[12] Axel Takacs adds that comparative theological learning may challenge or subvert the hegemonic representations of one's own theological tradition.[13] Personally, the goal of this comparison is closest to Cornille's definition of appropriation, which is "the appropriation by one tradition of new elements derived from another religious tradition,"[14] with elements of reaffirmation of and subversion to both traditions. It will become clear later that while Tillich's system of polarities is constructive in intensifying migrations' many contradictory forces and their interactions, I have not always resonated with the despair and anxiety over life's tension, which, according to Tillich, is a prominent feature of human existence. Likewise, while I lean into *Laozi*'s harmonious attitude, Chinese thought in general (including *Laozi*) have not always made space for the challenges, conflicts, and losses in one's story. Advancing theological growth through such a process of appropriating and integrating distinctive elements in different religions requires a particular theological stance that "recognizes the possibility of truth in difference."[15] This challenging task raises theological and hermeneutical questions such as syncretism and threats to both traditions. Consequently, this kind of comparison must be done with care and sensitivity. Out of respect to Tillich, *Laozi*, and the migration context, I share my positionality with readers, hoping to address some concerns and model a process of appropriation with critical subversions and affirmative appreciation.

I happen to be one who, like John Thatamanil, believes in the value of conversations across traditions and that it is possible to absorb the virtues of both traditions and overcome what is inadequate in each.[16] For me, negotiating the virtues and inadequacies of each tradition involves challenging and affirming both traditions simultaneously. Such a theological disposition may be formidable for those who regard their religion as "self-sufficient and in possession of the fullness of the means to salvation or liberation" or those who find it "unsettling and threatening" that their own "cherished religious elements are absorbed into another tradition."[17] While I am sympathetic to these theological positions, I do not subscribe to either. Growing up in China, I, and many Chinese people, perform rituals and draw wisdom from different religious traditions largely indiscriminately. It is not uncommon for people to identify with multiple religious traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and the so-called popular or folk religions. One can also observe Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian rituals and practices at once without

[12] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology,* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020), 115-148.
[13] Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, "Comparative Theology and Interreligious Studies: Embracing and Transgressing the Dialogical Relationships Among Religious Traditions," in *A Companion to Comparative Theology* (Brill, 2022), 566.
[14] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 134.
[15] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 135.
[16] John J. Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 186, quoted in Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 136.
[17] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 137.

membership in any of their temples or identifying as a Buddhist or Daoist.[18] Additionally, the development of these traditions throughout history involved negotiating and integrating elements of others.[19] Hence, Anna Sun joins many scholars of Chinese religions and argues that a concept of religion that assumes the exclusivity of belief, conversion, theology, and membership affiliation cannot capture what is distinctive of Chinese religious life.[20]

Therefore, my approach to comparative theology is largely based on this confessional stance and can be best described by the "religious tool kit" or "repertoire" framework. Studying Chinese religious life as a lived experience, Sun contends that the notion of a tool kit emphasizes "the fact that there are diverse religious traditions (beliefs, symbols, objects, and practices) available to people, the way very different tools are ready for use in a large tool bag."[21] Accordingly, the framework stresses "the freedom and creativity of individual actions in Chinese religious practices."[22] The religious tool kit model moves beyond differentiating rigid boundaries among different religions and focuses on values, rituals, beliefs, and other symbolic practices and their interactions.

Admittedly, my theological disposition and comfort with porous boundaries only address half of the story. I am responsible for remaining sensitive to the theological significance of the religious symbols, rituals, and teachings I am borrowing (in this case, Christianity), respecting their unique context, and upholding their integrity. This is another reason why I have chosen Tillich for this comparison. Tillich's method of correlation and its rigorous inquiry into existential questions make it possible for interreligious dialogues such as this one without de-contextualizing specific Christian elements. I have also found the existential themes in Tillich's theology advantageous and accessible to speak to non-Christian audiences, which is an important vocational commitment personally. Moreover, it is perhaps not a coincidence that I have found Tillich's theology advantageous to conceptualize migration, given that he migrated from Germany to the United States at age 47, started learning English, and eventually published works that we read today, such as the three volumes of his *Systematic Theology*. I explained earlier why Tillich and *Laozi* are compatible choices for comparison. I hope it becomes clear that my affirmation and challenge to both traditions come from a place of respect and reciprocal exchange.

Yet again, insofar as I uphold the integrity of each text and tradition and the comparative approach's rigor, my primary concern is how theological knowledge shapes people's daily lives. Ultimately, this article will have achieved its purpose if it prompts its readers—migrants and beyond—to (re)consider the meanings of tensions in life.

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[18] Anna Sun, "The Study of Chinese Religions in the Social Sciences: Beyond the Monotheistic Assumptions," in *Religion and Orientalism in Asian Studies*, ed. Kiri Paramore (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 51–52.
[19] For example, the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties absorbed Buddhism and Daoism to consummate the ethical system of Confucianism. For a more detailed history of Chinese religions from a psychological perspective, read Liqing Lu and Jinhua Ke, "A Concise History of Chinese Psychology of Religion," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 5 (December 1, 2012): 623–39.
[20] Sun, "The Study of Chinese Religions in the Social Sciences: Beyond the Monotheistic Assumptions," 71.
[21] Sun, "The Study of Chinese Religions in the Social Sciences: Beyond the Monotheistic Assumptions," 66.
[22] Sun, "The Study of Chinese Religions in the Social Sciences: Beyond the Monotheistic Assumptions," 66.

Leaving and Arriving

Let us now turn to the migration journey. Discussions around migration often revolve around two topics: first, how migrants influence a host country's culture, economics, and politics, and second, how these migrant individuals and communities are impacted through relocation and acculturation. Therapeutic approaches to working with migrant individuals and families unfold around the latter, focusing on clients' experiences of systemic trauma in their home countries, challenges with cultural adjustment in their host countries' sociopolitical climate, and overall psychological impacts of transition and displacements.[23]

Definition matters. The classification of various migrant communities—for example, immigrants (first, 1.5- and 2nd-generation), refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented, international students and scholars, and so on—is complicated and political, with race and religion adding more complexities. The definition of one's legal status affects a person's self-understanding and how they are perceived in society, influencing government regulations and policies. For the purpose of this article, I am using the term "migrants" at a high level to encompass persons and communities who moved from one country to another for an extended period as adults.[24] To truly understand migrants' stories, examining their experiences before and after migration is imperative. People move for different reasons, and context matters to one's story. Those who come to the United States for school or job opportunities and those who flee violence and war in their countries of origin are unlikely to have had similar experiences in their home countries pre-migration. Similarly, they will also have different experiences upon arriving in the new lands. Hugo Kamya and Marsha Mirkin argue that "the premigration experience encompasses not just the events before the migrants' departure but also the remote history and context for these immigrants."[25] In other words, the past is not in the past; it remains a part of who the person is and sets the ground for post-migration experiences.

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[23] Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation,* 8.

[24] This definition is an adaptation of Pratyusha Tummala-Narra's definition of immigrants. In the United States context, there are several classifications concerning immigrants, with race adding more complexities. Psychologist Pratyusha Tummala-Narra defines racial minority immigrants and racial minority immigrant-origin individuals as "individuals who either migrated to the United States from another country or are the children or descendants of these immigrants and who are classified or perceived as racial minorities in the United States." Within these communities, "first-generation immigrants refer to those who arrive to the United States as adults, 1.5-generation immigrants refers to those who arrive to the United States by age 12 years, and the second generation and later generations refer to individuals who are born and raised in the United States" (Tummala-Narra 2021, 6–7). Adopting Tummala-Narra's definition of "first-generation immigrants," "migrants" in this article refers to those who moved from one country to another country as adults for an extended period. I use the term "migrants" intentionally to include various legal status including immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented, international students, etc. Additionally, I use "migrants" to decentralize the host country's perspective and highlight the dynamic interplays between the home and host countries, pre- and post- migration. Further, my analysis does not deal with race directly, for racial minority immigrants' unique experiences, refer to Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, *Trauma and Racial Minority Immigrants: Turmoil, Uncertainty, and Resistance*, Cultural, Racial, and Ethnic Psychology Book Series (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2021).

[25] Hugo Kamya and Marsha Pravder Mirkin, "Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families," in *Revisioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice*, ed. Monica McGoldrick and Kenneth V. Hardy, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2019), 407.

Nevertheless, the mental health field has identified a few typical dynamics in migration. One major issue that impacts migrants' well-being is attachment disruption.[26] Life is disrupted when people leave behind their countries of origin, cultures, and communities. Therefore, migration is often accompanied by a loss of languages, a sense of home, history, religions, spiritual practices, and what is culturally familiar, valued, and believed. Such loss creates a disconnection from migrants' relationship with themselves and with the people around them.[27] Meanwhile, they encounter different cultures, belief systems, values, and lifestyles in the new countries. While acculturation creates new possibilities, the clash of cultures due to a lack of proper integration may threaten a person's existence.[28]

Furthermore, violence both pre-migration and post-migration can also cause significant disturbances. Some migrants and refugee families escaping war may have experienced traumatic life events. In such cases, leaving one's country of origin is courageous and often forced. Finding shelter in a new country may have protected them from persecution and other turmoil, yet the trauma of violence and forced dislocation accompanies them. Moreover, violence also exists in their host countries. Still, many migrant families and individuals arrive at their idealized "safe haven" without much knowledge about the new countries' socio-political, racial, and economic challenges. Take the United States, for example; migrants are often viewed as threatening the status quo in the dominant U.S. culture. The anti-immigrant sentiment has created severe emotional, social, and economic obstacles for various populations throughout U.S. history based on race, religion, and country of origin.[29]

When clinicians and religious leaders care for migrants, the work has predominantly focused on these challenges and obstacles. Lately, some scholars who are migrants or of migrant origin have started raising awareness about the importance of the other side of the story—strength and resilience. Psychoanalyst Salman Akhtar acknowledges that, despite the grief, trauma, loss, and disruption, migration is also a story of "human ambition," "human freedom," and "human desire."[30] Migration is a restless journey for adventure, discovery, survival, and possibilities. It cannot be possible without courage, determination, resilience, intentionality, and extraordinary effort. Therefore, though the language of pre- and post-migration stressors can help clinicians and religious leaders attend to the complexity of migrants' journeys, such a linear understanding of migration collapses important nuances and can fuel a pathologizing and disempowering narrative. Focusing solely on loss, guilt, confusion, depression, and other negative experiences can be harmful and must be brought into conversation with migrant persons' strengths, resilience, courage, and tenacity to thrive amidst adversity.

Tillich: The Polarized Human Condition

Having reviewed the process of migration and the need for a migrant to hold seemingly opposite experiences, such as loss and grief on the one hand and resilience and strength, on the other, we

[26] Kamya and Mirkin, "Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families," 403.
[27] Kamya and Mirkin, "Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families," 404.
[28] Kamya and Mirkin, "Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families," 412.
[29] Kamya and Mirkin, "Working with Immigrant and Refugee Families," 410.
[30] Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 8.

turn to Christian theologian Paul Tillich and examine his framework of polarities, which provides a pathway to explore the complex lived experiences of migration with an existential depth.

First and foremost, for Tillich the ontological basis of human existence is formed around sets of paradoxes. The word "paradox" refers to the kind of relationship that is at once opposite from and interdependent upon one another. Tillich argues that "being a self means being separated in some ways from everything else, having everything else opposite from one's self." But simultaneously, humans belong to a world, said differently, an environment. This world is a place "at which [one] looks, from which [one] is separated and to which [one] belongs."[31] Therefore, for Tillich, we are at once separated and connected; one's state cannot exist without the other. The human need to belong is simultaneously met with anxieties of separation. One creates a sense of belonging by holding onto something like family, home, community, language, culture, land, God, and even food. The migration process fundamentally disrupts such efforts if these attachments can be seen as human beings' attempts to cope with separation anxieties. The Self is left to confront separation, not-being, not-belonging, not-holding, and not-being-held.

Now, let us take a small step further into this ontological structure. Tillich suggests three pairs of outstanding polarities constitute the basic Self-World structure: individualization and participation, dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny. In every polarity, each pole is limited and sustained by the other one.[32] Each pair of these polarities can inform unique aspects of migration; together, they form a profound system in which complexities and ambiguities are possible. This paper will focus specifically on the polarities of dynamics and form as well as on freedom and destiny to demonstrate how they can be used to interpret the existential realities of migration.

Dynamics and Form

For Tillich, "being something means having a form. The form makes a thing what it is, is its content, its definite power of being."[33] Form does not make being stagnant. Being also has a dynamic character—everything tends to transcend itself and create new forms. In other words, being and becoming are always in tension and condition one another. Concerning an individual who migrated from one culture to another, "form" points to their inherited identities and who they originally were. Then there is the encounter of differences: the possibilities, the new, and the dynamic. Being and becoming—solid forms and dynamic identities—are interwoven in the migration story. Growth for the individual requires preserving key identities and traditions (that is, self-conservation) and becoming culturally literate in the new environment (that is, self-transcendence). One finds oneself constantly negotiating between preserving who one has been and becoming someone new. For Tillich, being on the two poles of dynamic and form requires one to unite "identity and difference, rest and movement, conservation and change," a process where "it is impossible to speak of being without also speaking of becoming, [and] vice versa."[34]

[31]Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (University of Chicago Press, 1951), 170–71.
[32] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1,* 198.
[33] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1,* 178.
[34] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1,* 181.

Migrants often find themselves in liminal places where old identities encounter new ones. Acculturation in a new environment inevitably brings fresh understandings of who they are. Self-identity becomes fluid, and "Who am I?" becomes more nuanced. The past and the present, the old and the new, the form and the dynamics are tense and often contradictory. The integration of one's self appears to be a challenging task. Tillich maintains that integration is the state of balance between self-identity and self-alteration.[35] For Tillich, self-integration is impossible if one holds onto a limited, stabilized, and immovable set of identities. Life's content must be dynamic and can be changed and increased. Merely preserving self-identity is a failure to achieve self-integration and would be considered disintegration.[36] Many migrants deny the changes when trying to adjust to new realities. Such repudiation can impact one's perception of and interaction with the environment. As a result, this could lead migrants to reject the local community and disassociate from it.[37]

Meanwhile, Tillich also warns against the danger of losing one's centered identity altogether. The dispersing power of manifoldness threatens life's core and weakens one's self-identity. Self-alteration raises the risk of another kind of disintegration—the inability to return and preserve oneself.[38] Tillich acknowledges that self-integration is ambiguously rooted in the necessity to encounter and acquire new realities into its center without its being disrupted. Said differently, by rapidly and fully taking on the adopted countries' norms, some migrants tend to declare absolute discontinuity between the past and the present and abandon their histories, food, thinking, languages, and cultures altogether.[39] For Tillich, this is not self-integration either. The process of integration involves a circular movement starting from self-identity, growing through self-alteration without destroying life's core, and being able to return to one's self.[40]

Freedom and Destiny

Besides a circular movement of integrating identity and alteration, Tillich suggests that potentiality can be actualized through self-creation. In essence, self-creation is possible under the principle of growth. Although every being is made of certain forms, life drives towards growth and new forms. This process of creating new centers (that is, self-creation) expands life horizontally and actualizes potentiality and flourishing.[41]

However, Tillich warns that there is always a chaotic moment between the old and the new forms, a moment of "no longer and not yet." This is a crisis moment where destruction can appear in one of two ways. Firstly, one may resist creation, and life returns to its starting point. Alternatively, life may be destroyed by the chaos.[42] This "no-longer" and "not-yet" moment is prominent and prolonged in the migration journey. For example, following migration, many people must give up their previous professions (for example, as doctors, physicians, professors, and so on). They are compelled to seek lower-level jobs due to varying educational and licensing

[35] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 41.
[36] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3,* 33.
[37] Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 21.
[38] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3*, 33.
[39] Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 22.
[40] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3*, 30–42.
[41] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3,* 30.
[42] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3,* 50–51.

requirements. The drastic vocational and social status shift forces migrants to put their existing senses of self on hold for some extended time.[43] Staying in this in-between space, regarding their careers and self-perceptions, demands tremendous resilience.

Therefore, Tillich argues that human beings' freedom is always finite and that all the potentialities that constitute one's freedom are limited by the opposite pole—destiny.[44] For Tillich, freedom refers to an individual's deliberation, decision, and responsibility, whereas destiny is formed by nature, history, society, etc., including the communities to which one belongs, the environment that has shaped the person, and the world that has made an impact on the individual.[45] Destiny should not be understood as a supernatural power determining what would happen to anyone. For Tillich, destiny points to the conditions and limits of one's freedom: "Destiny is the basis of one's freedom, and freedom participates in shaping one's destiny."[46] In other words, destiny signals the broader context from which our decisions/freedom arise. One's freedom to act and decide is conditioned by the aggregate of my past decisions, the socio-political environment that has shaped me, and the world that has impacted me. Conversely, each decision also shapes this context. Being on the poles of polarity, destiny and freedom condition one another and mutually form each other, setting the stage for Tillich's understanding of finitude and anxiety. In the case of migration, individuals exhibit an extraordinary understanding of their motivations, act upon their wills, and hold themselves responsible for their paths. However, while their success and well-being depend on personal strengths and capacities, it is also limited by institutional factors such as government systems, immigration policies, and socioeconomic conditions around class, race, and employment, to name a few.

Tillich in Dialogue with *Laozi*: Making Meaning of Life's Tension

Tillich: Tension and Anxiety

So far, with Tillich's polar structure of reality, I have conceptualized a basic understanding of migration as an experience of living in tension. Rather than a linear progression from one side (pre-migration) to the other (post-migration), the sets of paradoxical polarities emphasize the interactions between seemingly opposite yet interdependent forces: leaving and arriving, separation and connection, self-conservation (self-identity, form) and self-alteration (acculturation, dynamics), strength and capacities (freedom) and loss and limitations (destiny). Achieving a more complex understanding of migration is only the first step. As a practical theologian working with psychological theories, I am concerned about how theological frameworks may affect people's psychological functioning through a meaning-making process. Notably, there is prevailing anxiety and despair for Tillich, accompanied by an awareness of the tense nature of human existence. Humans have freedom but are finite. All the potentialities constituting one's freedom are limited by the opposite pole—one's destiny. Additionally, humans are aware of such finitude. For Tillich, such awareness of existential structure is anxiety-inducing.

[43] Akhtar, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 38.
[44] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 32.
[45] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 184–85.
[46] Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume 1, 185.

It brings a painful realization of lost eternity—the ultimate to which one belongs but from which one is excluded and estranged. Tillich understands finitude as anxious and despairing.[47]

Tillich does not explicitly say that tensions are to be rejected or that resolution is possible, but his tolerance of such an ontological structure appears uneasy. Tillich expresses despair in his view on this tension since being is perpetually subjected to the threat of non-being. Ultimately, he longs for infinity, the unconditioned, and the absolute. He imagines a New Being (that is, Christ) as so powerful that it overcomes this estrangement. Peter Ping Li argues that such an approach only takes paradox as temporarily tolerable but ultimately problematic.[48] Eventually, the goal is still the resolution of paradox or tensions. Influenced by Hegel, Tillich's theology is rooted in a Western epistemology and philosophical tradition which regards contradiction as a temporary state that will be replaced by integrated synthesis, which is viewed as a higher level of functioning.[49] This is not inherently a problem should one find resonance in the language of anxiety and despair when confronting life's tension.

However, in the context of migration, where we naturally deal with multiple cultures, religions, theological dispositions, and worldviews, interpreting Tillich's framework and its application to migrants' meaning-making require extra caution. Though "meaning" is elusive and difficult to investigate empirically, many psychologists of religion, who acknowledge the search for meaning as a central human functioning and religion's unique position to help in that search, have identified situational and dispositional factors that may influence the attribution of meaning.[50] For example, social psychology, in general, has emphasized the role of immediate environmental factors in determining thinking and behavior.[51] Additionally, individual factors such as one's (religious) background, interests, personality, and language available to the person also make a difference in the cognitive meaning-making process.[52] Therefore, I consider comparative theology integral to this work, understanding the meaning-attribution of a population living between environments, cultures, languages, and religions. One must assume neither that certain experiences (for example, living in tension) will lead people to make similar meanings (for example, anxiety) nor that meaning-making is a static or linear process. Therefore, to contrast Tillich's anxiety and despair, I demonstrate how tension and contradictions are attributed to different meanings in the classic Daoist way of life.

Laozi*: Contradiction and Harmony*

According to Kaiping Peng and Richard Nisbett, contradiction is one of the three fundamental principles of Chinese dialectical epistemology.[53] In Daoism, for example, being and nonbeing

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[47] Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2,* 66–78.
[48] Peter Ping Li, "The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions: The Indigenous Features and Geocentric Implications" in *The Psychological and Cultural Foundations of East Asian Cognition: Contradiction, Change, and Holism,* eds. Julie Spencer-Rodgers and Kaiping Peng (Oxford University Press, 2018), 44.
[49] Kaiping Peng and Richard E Nisbett, "Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning About Contradiction," *American Psychologist* 54, no.9 (1999), 743.
[50] Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion : An Empirical Approach*, vol. Fifth edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2018), 46–53.
[51] Hood et. al., *The Psychology of Religion : An Empirical Approach*, 48,
[52] Hood et. al., *The Psychology of Religion : An Empirical Approach*, 52–53.
[53] Peng and Nisbett, "Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning About Contradiction," 743.

produce each other and the two sides of any contradiction exist in an active harmony, opposed but connected and mutually controlling.[54] In this sense, Daoism and Chinese thought generally join Tillich in acknowledging the tensions in the human condition. However, Daoism does not speak of threats or approach paradoxes, tensions, or contradictions with unease. Susannah B. F. Paletz and colleagues observe that while Hegelian dialecticism emphasizes synthesis and integration, most East Asian philosophical and religious ideas focus on tolerance and acceptance of contradiction. In other words, "contradiction may give rise to a tension that need never be resolved."[55] Other scholars also share this perspective. Li maintains that, in Daoism, "all opposite elements always coexist in an interdependent, interactive, and interpenetrative manner to achieve both natural and social harmonies."[56] Therefore, for Paletz and colleagues, the East Asian dialectic (for example, Daoist) and the Hegelian dialectic (for example, Tillich) result in different affective and cognitive reactions to observing opposites and experiencing contradiction.[57] This observation will have fruitful implications for our work in understanding migrants' meaning-making processes, psychological functioning, and existential well-being. To show this, I juxtapose the Daoist classic *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) with Tillich's understanding of tension.

Admittedly, *Laozi* agrees with Tillich in acknowledging that reality is filled with opposing forces. "Being and non-being grow out of one another; difficult and easy complete one another; long and short test one another; high and low determine one another; pitch and mode give harmony to one another; front and back give sequence to one another."[58] Like Tillich's notion of paradox, *Laozi*'s dialectical thinking maintains that these contradictions are not only in tension but also rely on each other and cannot exist without one another.

However, *Laozi* differs drastically from Tillich in making meanings of such a paradoxical reality. For *Laozi* and Daoism in general, the ideal life is a life in harmony with the Dao (道), translated as "the Way." All things arise from Dao.[59] Dao is unimpeded harmony and all-pervading.[60] Its potential is inexhaustible.[61] The Way is invisible (*yi*, 夷), inaudible (*xi*, 希), intangible (*wei*, 微), and cannot be defined.[62] The Way is a natural state, free from desires, living simply and genuinely as "heaven-human integration" (天人合一). Though contradictions are constitutive of the created universe, they should neither be feared nor give rise to anxiety because harmony can be achieved through the union of two opposing forces.[63] In other words, opposing forces are understood in relative terms that partially affirm and partially negate each other. This opposites-in-unity (相生相克) principle undergirds Chinese thought at large, as seen in the system

[54] Peng and Nisbett, "Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning About Contradiction," 743.
[55] Susannah B. F. Paletz et al., "Dialectical Thinking and Creativity from Many Perspectives: Contradiction and Tension," in *The Psychological and Cultural Foundations of East Asian Cognition: Contradiction, Change, and Holism*, ed. Julie Spencer-Rodgers and Kaiping Peng (Oxford University Press, 2018), 275.
[56] Li, *The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions*, 47.
[57] Paletz et al., "Dialectical Thinking and Creativity from Many Perspectives: Contradiction and Tension," 276.
[58] *Laozi*, Chapter 2, 故有无相生，难易相成，长短相较，高下相倾，音声相和，前后相随。trans. by Waley.
[59] See *Laozi*, Chapters 42 and 51.
[60] *Laozi*, Chapter 4, 道冲, trans., adapted from Cleary and Lin.
[61] *Laozi*, Chapter 4, 不盈, trans., by Lin.
[62] *Laozi*, Chapter 14, trans., by Lin.
[63] *Laozi*, Chapter 42, 万物负阴抱阳，冲气以为和. "Creatures cannot turn their back to the shade without having the sun on their bellies, and all beings bear yin and embrace yang, and it is through the union/blending/combining of these forces/qi/breaths of the two that their harmony depends." Translation adapted from Cleary, Chan, Lin, Waley, as well as Feng and English.

of yin-yang balancing. As a shared epistemology, ancient Chinese traditions embraced a "cognitive system of balancing opposite elements."[64] Such an epistemology, according to Li, "balances the trade-off and synergy between opposite elements as both conflicting and complementary."[65] Therefore, contradictions are treated by *Laozi* and other Chinese thinkers as such given structures of all things, "not only inevitable but also desirable for learning in all complex contexts."[66] Ancient Chinese thinkers were not preoccupied with why and how such a structure came to be; instead, they were concerned with achieving a good life given such an awareness.

On such a note, the latter half of *Laozi* pays attention to differing virtues (德, *de* as in *Dao-de-jing*) and practices, through which one may cultivate a harmonious way of life with the Dao. Understood together, the concepts of Dao and *de* pertain to "the power of individuals to realize themselves within their environment."[67] The text explores various virtuous qualities such as humility, softness, and gentleness with rich metaphors such as the qualities of water and the valley,[68] but it is widely accepted that the ultimate value that undergirds these Daoist virtues is *ziran* (自然), which is "the way things are without forceful interference from external sources."[69] Chapter 25 of *Laozi*, in recognition of the four great powers of the universe—King, Earth, Heaven, and Dao—places *ziran* above everything and regards *ziran* as the most extraordinary power after which all things follow. Human beings model themselves after the earth; the earth models itself after heaven; the heaven models itself after the Dao, and the Dao models itself after what is natural.[70]

However, the interpretation of *ziran* is debated. Hektor Yan proposes three possible interpretations of *ziran*. First, it can be understood literally as "nature," which refers to "the totality of the phenomena in the existing world." Nature contains both the "nourishing and benefiting features" as well as the "destructive forces contrary to the well-being of many species."[71] Accordingly, *ziran*, or nature, has a metaphysical meaning above the literal sense. Lastly, Yan proposes to interpret *ziran* or nature as "essence, or the essential qualities of things."[72] In this sense, acting according to the Dao or *ziran* refers to acting according to our essence. For Yan, "it is within our ability to act according to our essence, but it is possible that it is not the case that we act in this way. And when we are actually acting according to our essence (that is, following the Dao), it can be said that we are most truly ourselves, in the sense that our most defining qualities are actualized."[73] Karyn Lai, however, finds the naturalistic and metaphysical interpretations of *ziran* problematic as they raise ethical concerns. For Lai, such a model that

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[64] Li, The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions, 39.
[65] Li, The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions, 39.
[66] Li, The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions, 39.
[67] Karyn Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," *Dao* 6, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 327.
[68] See *Laozi*, Chapter 76, 柔弱. Chapter 8, 上善若水。
[69] Shu-Yi Wang, Y. Joel Wong, and Kuang-Hui Yeh, "Relationship Harmony, Dialectical Coping, and Nonattachment: Chinese Indigenous Well-Being and Mental Health," *The Counseling Psychologist* 44, no.1 (2016): 78–108.
[70] *Laozi*, Chapter 25, 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然, trans., adapted from Lin, as well as Feng and English.
[71] Hektor K. T. Yan, "A Paradox of Virtue: The Daodejing on Virtue and Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 178.
[72] Yan, "A Paradox of Virtue: The Daodejing on Virtue and Moral Philosophy," 179.
[73] Yan, "A Paradox of Virtue: The Daodejing on Virtue and Moral Philosophy," 179.

emphasizes the normative content of nature could endorse a prescription path, forcing individuals to simply "fit in" or "go with the flow."[74] Additionally, Lai argues that since the text does not indicate which features of nature are to be modeled, the understanding of *ziran* as "nature" or "naturalness" raises difficult interpretive questions, rendering it ineffective and implausible.[75]

Therefore, Lai proposes an alternative translation of *ziran* as spontaneity or "self-so-ness," referring to *zi* (自) as "self" and *ran* (然) as "so" or "as it is." The compound meaning of the two Chinese characters *zi* and *ran* is expressed as "self-as-it-is-so."[76] Allowing one to act according to *ziran* as "self-as-it-is" or "spontaneity" requires us to refrain from interference or impose unnecessary constraints on the individual. *Ziran* is closely related to another fundamental yet complicated Daoist concept, *wuwei* (无为), which I shall not elaborate on.[77]

For our purpose, since both readings of *ziran* as nature (naturalness) or spontaneity (essence, self-so-ness) are supported by the text,[78] I consider it most fruitful to hold both interpretations in tension. While the understanding of *ziran* as "nature" or "naturalness" may suggest a prescriptive—and thus normative—understanding of reality as such, *ziran* as "self-so-ness," "spontaneity," or "essence" emphasizes individuals in their context, especially concerning their freedom to deliberate beyond the boundaries of convention. With this in mind, for *Laozi* contradictions and tensions are how things naturally are (*ziran* as nature and naturalness), emphasizing not anxiety or despair but tolerance and acceptance. *Ziran* elicits a state of being with tension that is not forced but peaceful coexistence. Paradox understood in this way moves beyond Tillich's tragic polarization. *Laozi* takes all things, including those of contradictory nature, as suchness—the way things are—and does not forcefully attempt to resolve them. Meanwhile, *ziran*, understood as spontaneity and essence, also points to a proactive aspect of the self amidst her conditioned environment. Though life's dispersing power pulls us in many directions, for *Laozi*, acting according to one's truest self or essence is still possible.

This subtle but fundamental departure from Tillich's despair toward paradox is remarkable and worth pondering. Tillich and *Laozi* have drastically different meanings based on seemingly similar understandings of the human condition. Although both recognize life's contradictory and tensive structure, Tillich considers such reality a tragedy, responding with anxiety and despair. In contrast, *Laozi* emphasizes the cultivation of harmony in life by accepting contradictions as such and acting according to one's truest self. Within the contradictory reality, at the core of the Dao is yin-yang balancing. Li argues that the system of yin-yang balancing is related to the lens of paradox, even while going above and beyond it.[79] Yin-yang balancing describes contradictions only in relative terms rather than viewing them as absolute polar opposites. Differences or "the other" should not be eliminated but desired. The difference between Tillich's and *Laozi*'s views on opposites is the difference between living *in* imposed

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[74] Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," 328
[75] Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," 329.
[76] Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," 330.
[77] See *Laozi* chapters 12, 18, 19, 20, 37, and 53. To find any detailed analysis of *wuwei* and *ziran-wuwei* matrix, refer to Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," 332-337.
[78] Lai, "Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing: An Ethical Assessment," 332.
[79] Li, *The Epistemology of Yin-Yang Balancing as the Root of Chinese Cultural Traditions*, 48.

tension and living comfortably *with* tension as suchness. Prior empirical research seems to support this distinction.[80]

Implications and Example

As mentioned, the comparison between Tillich and *Laozi* was necessary to make sense of my cross-cultural migration journey. Appropriating elements of Tillich's theology, which highlights the drama between each polarity, complemented *Laozi*'s position, which accepts tension as normative without questioning. I agree with Lai that in emphasizing *ziran* as naturalness, the Daoist approach to tension, and Chinese thought in general in its focus on harmony, risks reinforcing a prescriptive path that one ought to simply accept, not allowing space for reflections on the grief, loss, challenges, and conflicts accompanying one's journey. My encounter with Tillich subverts such a harmonious attitude that may erase individual struggles and ignore the emotional, psychological, and material challenges of life; in this case, *ziran* leads not to harmony but to quietism and self-resignation. Nevertheless, *ziran* remains an important wisdom and way of life for me, who finds it difficult to relate to anxiety and despair as answers to life's contradictory nature, as Tillich does. Thus, the encounter with Tillich also reaffirmed my belief in our ability to act according to our truest self and essence (*ziran* as spontaneity or self-so-ness) despite an ambiguous human condition.

Moreover, such a comparison has important implications beyond my personal story. I hope my approach to Tillich and *Laozi* will illuminate a path for people to make sense of their own experiences living in/with tension. Furthermore, this comparison has implications on how helping professionals, such as therapists, chaplains, social workers, and religious leaders, can support migrant individuals and families to make sense of their stories. The distinction between Tillich and *Laozi* reminds us that searching for meaning is a complex process often affected by a person's situational and environmental context. We must assume neither that certain experiences (that is, migration) will produce similar responses (for example, anxiety), nor that meaning-making is a static or linear process. Individual factors such as one's philosophical background and religious disposition are uniquely positioned to influence the attribution of meaning and therefore how one responds. Capturing the nuanced experiences of migrant persons, communities, and their meaning-making processes—including potential sources of strengths, resilience, and growth—this comparison further indicates that tending to migrants' existential realities will enrich the current conceptualization of migration, which focuses on the pre-and post-migration stressors.

Caring for migrant persons requires helping professionals to understand and relate to the cultural, philosophical, and religious identities of the person and identify how their values and

[80] For evidence that East Asians indeed are more likely to tolerate and accept contradiction without a need for synthesis when compared to North Americans, and that they are more tolerant of the coexistence of opposing traits, emotions, and attitudes within themselves, see, for example, Choi & Choi, 2002; Spencer-Rodgers, et al., 2009; Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang, 2010; Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004. For research suggesting that East Asians are also more likely to tolerate contradictions in others and in the world, see Peng & Nisbett, 1999, 2000); and that, on average, they are less surprised by contradictory evidence, see Choi & Nisbett, 2000; see also Paletz et al., 2018, p. 276.

beliefs may impact their meaning-making. This does not mean every clinician and religious leader should acquire knowledge and skills about every culture and religion; that is not possible. Instead, it concerns a way of being with a migrant person with enhanced awareness that the client's multifaceted identities—culture, religion, philosophy, worldview, race, age, gender, socio-economic background, and so on—are crucial to the therapeutic process. To achieve this, helping professionals may find it beneficial to adopt the multicultural orientation framework (MCO) in their work. The three pillars of the MCO framework are cultural humility, cultural opportunities, and cultural comfort.[81] "Culture" is understood loosely here and encompasses clients' beliefs, values, and worldviews. Cultural humility articulates a helpful way for professionals to be with migrant persons. It requires helping professionals to take an other-oriented stance and take seriously the cultural identities that are most important to the person. Culturally humble clinicians and spiritual/religious leaders are motivated to use opportunities to engage the person's salient beliefs in depth (that is, cultural opportunities). They should also gradually experience greater ease when engaging in conversations surrounding the person's cultural identities, even if it is a topic unfamiliar to them (that is, cultural comfort). It is beyond this article's purpose to elaborate further on the MCO framework and its application to the migrant population. That itself warrants another paper for a future project. I briefly introduce it here as a potential resource for helping professionals to consider when caring for migrant clients. Should someone find the concepts intriguing, they can find a detailed description of the framework through Don Davis and colleagues' narrative review of the multicultural orientation framework.[82] For now, I will provide a concrete case study to demonstrate an MCO stance. Though the case is designed in therapy, spiritual and religious leaders such as chaplains and pastors will also find MCO constructive in their vocations.

In a therapy session, a Chinese migrant client mentioned that she was born and raised in China, a society greatly influenced by Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist values, and her presenting concern centers on isolation and depressive symptoms that have persisted for a year. Instead of focusing on her depressive symptomology, an MCO therapist may explore what being "born and raised in China" means for the client. Another area worth exploring is how being raised in Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist values has impacted the client's views on societal norms, family relations, issues of achievements, gender roles, etc. These areas of exploration allow a deeper understanding of the migrant client's cultural values and experiences. They approach depressive symptoms through a more holistic angle rather than a diagnostic lens. Notably, contradictions and tension in migration may or may not surface as a point of discussion for said client. The client may also perceive their migration journey via a lens different from *Laozi* and harmony. The purpose of comparing Tillich and *Laozi*'s understanding of contradiction and applying it to migration is not to find a one-size-fits-all migrant narrative. Under the MCO framework, culturally humble therapists orient themselves in such a way that they recognize the potential of the client's beliefs and values and listen for opportunities in therapy to take advantage of the wisdom embedded in each client's story.

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[81] Jesse J. Owen et al., "Clients' Perceptions of Their Psychotherapists' Multicultural Orientation," *Psychotherapy* 48, no. 3 (2011): 274–82; Jesse Owen, "Early Career Perspectives on Psychotherapy Research and Practice: Psychotherapist Effects, Multicultural Orientation, and Couple Interventions," *Psychotherapy* 50, no. 4 (2013): 496–502.

[82] Don E. Davis et al., "The Multicultural Orientation Framework: A Narrative Review," *Psychotherapy* 55, no. 1 (2018), 92.

Conclusion

Starting from the lived experience of migration and how it impacts the human psyche from a psychodynamic perspective, I have demonstrated the need to understand migrants' deep existential realities. Particularly, I interpreted their experience of living in multi-layered tensions through Christian theologian Paul Tillich's polarity. Tillich's theology helps illustrate the contradictory reality that is often prominent in migration. Tillich's system moves beyond a linear understanding of moving from one side (pre-migration) to the other (post-migration). Rather, it highlights the dynamic interactions between opposite yet interdependent forces: leaving and arriving, separation and connection, strength and capacities as well as loss and limitations. The system is complex enough to interpret the multifaceted migration experience with depth, giving language to the intricacy of migration and capturing its contradictory yet dynamic conditions. Notably, the migration story is not an exception to living in tensions and being pulled in opposite directions. Migration only exacerbates the polarized structure that, according to Tillich, is embedded in human existence.

Moreover, by comparing Tillich and *Laozi* and teasing out how they approach life's contradictions differently, I demonstrated that meaning-making is conditioned by a person's individual and situational context. One's cultural, religious, and philosophical dispositions significantly contribute to the meaning attribution process. Although both Tillich and *Laozi* acknowledge that life at any moment is ambiguous, Tillich regards ambiguities of existence as human predicaments with immense doubts and anxieties. In contrast, *Laozi* approaches such ambiguities much more positively, in that complexities and ambiguities are not only inevitable but also desirable. The comparative framework between Tillich and *Laozi* serves as a reminder that even if tension is a universal human condition across time and space, responses to such ultimate concerns vary based on personal, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Therefore, the multicultural orientation framework (MCO) was used to contextualize findings in the therapeutic work with migrant populations. Caring for migrant persons requires helping professionals to humbly attune to clients' cultures and worldviews and understand how these beliefs and values impact migrant persons' healing and meaning-making.

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