

## **Paul T. P. Wong: Professor, Mentor, Role Model, and Friend**

Mega Leung, M.A.

Dr. Paul Wong is known by many as an internationally recognized professor, researcher, clinical psychologist, writer, and significant contributor to the advancement of psychology; I am grateful for the godsend opportunity to have been taught by and worked closely with such a distinguished scholar over the years. Dr. Wong has significantly impacted my personal and professional growth in many ways. His role in my development from a student to a clinician and researcher had evolved as the years passed.

During my graduate studies in the M.A. Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University between 2000 and 2003, Dr. Wong was my professor. He was the instructor for many of my courses at the time. In particular, the one course that stood out in my memory was Multicultural Counselling. It was in that class that I had learned to embrace my own bi-cultural identity and to integrate this knowledge in my clinical work with clients from both eastern and western cultures as well as others with multiple cultural identities. As a Canadian immigrant with a Chinese background, I was immediately drawn to Dr. Wong's teachings in integrating Chinese wisdoms with Western psychology. Hence, during the second year of my studies when Dr. Wong made an open invitation for students to participate in his latest research project, I leapt at the opportunity to partake in what I thought was a short-term research project for my graduation, but in turn became a long-term venture that shaped my clinical orientation and research interest in the years that followed. Our research project was on the clinical implications and the scale development (Life Attitudes Scale) of Tragic Optimism: a construct coined by Viktor Frankl (1985) positing that a person can remain optimistic in spite of tragic experiences. Dr. Wong further developed the concept into an existential-humanistic model that integrates the duality of realistic pessimism and idealistic optimism (Wong, 2001). The tragic optimism model offers a theoretical framework of resilience that can withstand the harshness of tragedies, sufferings, and adversities (Wong, 2007)—a type of resilience that was especially relevant and urgently needed in light of the 9/11 tragedy that had occurred when the project was underway.

The tragic optimism project had broadened my worldview and perspective on an existential level, which also laid a solid foundation for my trauma and grief works in my career. In regards to the insights from the tragic optimism model, along with its larger encompassing framework of Dr. Wong's positive psychology 2.0 model (Wong, 2011), I have come to appreciate that misfortunes and adversities in life may be perceived as the essential ingredients to a person's development of character strengths and resilience. This concept is of particular significance as it instills hope to those who have been battered by the hardships of life.

During my studies at TWU, I shared the struggles of most graduate students, namely, financial stress. I was glad to work for Dr. Wong as his research and teaching assistant. The work was not difficult: it mainly involved filing the huge piles of research papers and correspondence seated in every corner and on every cabinet top in his office. It was initially overwhelming to see the mountains of papers waiting to be filed or attended to at first, but I quickly realized and accepted that no matter how fast I worked, I cannot compete with the rate of the incoming stacks. The aspect I valued most from being Dr. Wong's assistant was the conversations we had in his office and his encouragements to me at a time that was most needed in my life. I still remember vividly to this day when my finance was low near the end of the program, Dr. Wong had reassured me that I would be able to graduate even if it required him to pay for my tuition.

Fortunately, the payment was not necessary, but he nevertheless had to advocate on my behalf. Dr. Wong's kindness and generosity were beyond one's imagination of that from a professor to a student. Apparently, those who know Dr. Wong would not be foreign to his kindness and altruistic nature.

In the years following my graduation, Dr. Wong became my reference for all of my job applications. Despite his busy schedules and the frequency of the requests, Dr. Wong had not declined a single request, to which I am extremely grateful. Moreover, I trusted that he had given me positive feedback, as I was offered the opportunities most times rather than not. While I grew in my competence as a clinician, Dr. Wong continued to foster my learning in other areas by providing me with opportunities through trainings, presentation at conferences, and writing projects. He continued to coach, guide, and challenge me to develop further as a researcher and presenter.

Last but not least, Dr. Wong is my role model. In all the years I have interacted with Dr. Wong, what strikes me the most is the consistency of his transparency, authenticity, humility, courage, persistence, determination, and kindness. Dr. Wong demonstrates a way of life that is consistent to what he preaches: a living exhibition of a meaning-centered life that is apparent in his work, relationships, leadership, and ministry.

In summary, Dr. Paul Wong was my professor, supervisor, boss, reference, and continues to be my mentor, coach, role model, and friend—while the role he plays in my life may change over time, my respect and gratitude to him remain unchanged. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Lilian Wong for giving me this opportunity to contribute to Dr. Paul Wong's Festschrift as I join many others in congratulating and honoring his many professional achievements, and his positive contributions and impacts on the lives of others.

### References

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