

# Technique of Moving to Emptiness: Brief Operational Process

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## Abstract

Technique of Moving to Emptiness (TME) is a psychotherapeutic technique that induces client by therapist moving a visualized carrier loaded with specific symbols of psychosomatic symptoms of mental disorders repeatedly in different mental distances to relax or delete the symptoms. TME comes from mental regulating method of Chinese traditional culture and is an original and localizational psychotherapeutic technique. A brief and clear introduction of the ten operational steps of TME in clinic is given in the text.

## Keywords

Technique of Moving to Emptiness, Psychosomatic Symptom, Localization

## 1. Introduction

Technique of Moving to Emptiness (TME) is rooted in the ancient Chinese Buddhist and Taoist practices of focused imagination and mental stillness, guided by therapists to enable clients to fully utilize their imagination. First, the target mental illness or disorder is symbolically objectified and placed into a personally crafted imaginary container. Then the imagined container carrying the symbolic object is moved back and forth at different psychological distances in imagination, leading the symbol and the container to gradually change or even disappear during the process, to relieve the psychosomatic symptoms (Tianjun Liu, 1994).

Technique of Moving to Emptiness (TME) is one of the sub-projects of the National Support Plan Topic "Standardization and Demonstration Research on Ten Types of Mental Health Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Techniques" in 2010, and has been clinically applied with good therapeutic effects (Xia Yuxin, Wu Xiaoyun, Liu Tianjun, 2013).

This paper provides a brief overview of the 10 steps for clinical application of Yikong technique; traditional psychological thought and contemporary psychological mechanisms related to it will be discussed in a separate paper (Xia Yuxin, Wu Xiaoyun, Liu Tianjun, 2013). The operation of TME consists of two phases: the static phase and the dynamic phase. Before each stage, a brief 'three-step relaxation' exercise is

conducted to guide the visitor into a peaceful mood. Throughout the operation of TME, therapists guide and control the process by giving instructions or asking questions. In clinical applications, therapists should pay attention to establishing a therapeutic relationship that is adaptive to this operational process with the visitor. Furthermore, prior to treatment, therapists should introduce and explain the general principles and operational procedures of TME in a manner and language that the visitor can understand, based on their cultural and comprehensive levels.

## 2. Static phase

Objective: Choose a target problem, visualize its symbolic representation, and select an object to put the problem in.

### 2.1 Three-Step Relaxation

2.1.1 Body Relaxation: Sit up straight, place both hands on your knees, and lightly close eyes.

2.1.2 Breathing Relaxation: Focus only on breathing out for 1-2 minutes; leave some room for air, allowing a smooth transition to the next breath.

2.1.3 Mind Relaxation: Achieve calmness; let thoughts flow out with each exhalation.

### 2.2 Identify the Problem

#### 2.2.1 Select Target Problem

Psychological Symptoms: Emotions such as depression, anxiety, anger, fear, etc., should be categorized clearly.

Physical Symptoms: Issues like headaches, chest tightness, abdominal bloating, etc., should specify the area.

Note: The Emptying Technique targets the symptoms, which may stem from various psychological disorders, hence is different from diagnosis. Additionally, its primary focus is on the somatic manifestations of psychological disorders, though it may also have some efficacy for similar symptoms arising from physical illnesses.

2.2.2 Measure Influence: Self Report on a scale of 0-10. 0 means no influence at all and 10 means being deeply influenced. Client should record the influence point on record paper A.

2.2.3 Set Quantitative Criteria: Choose a problem with a minimum impact score of 7 or multiple problems with the total score of at least 7.

### 2.3. Imagine the Symbol of the Target Problem

#### 2.3.1. Imagining the Problem as a Symbolic Object

The therapist guides the client to imagine his/her physical and mental symptoms as

specific objects. For example, upset emotions can be imagined as tangled threads, and feelings of chest tightness as a stone.

### 2.3.2. Deep Imagining of the Symbolic Object

The therapist asks a series of questions targeting the symbolic object, to help the visitor visualize it clearly. For instance, if the symbolic object is a piece of black adhesive tape, the therapist may ask about its size, shape, colour, lustre, smell, stickiness, and texture.

i.e. What is the texture on the surface of the tape? Does the smell of the medicine inside come from traditional or Western medicine?

Through repeated sensory-inducing questions across various sensory, the objective is to create a vivid mental image.

### 2.4. Imagining a Container for the Symbolic Object

#### 2.4.1. Imagining a Suitable Container

The therapist guides the visitor to imagine a suitable container where the symbolic object can be placed. For instance, tangled threads can be placed in a cloth bag, and a stone can be placed in a wooden box.

#### 2.4.2. Repairing or Replacing the Container

If the symbolic object is obviously mismatched with the container, like a stone in a paper bag, the therapist should advise the client to reimagine the container in case it may break the container during future movement.

#### 2.4.3. Deep Imagining of the Container

The same method of questions is used to help have a specific and clearly visible mental image of the container.

### 2.5 Draw the Symbol and Object

Draw and list important characteristics.

## 3. Intentional Movement Stage

Objective: Move the container with the symbol of the problem while in the Deep imagine state, to address and resolve the problem.

### 3.1. Three-Step Relaxation

Same as 2.1.

### 3.2. Placing the Symbolic Object in the Container

#### 3.2.1. Inspecting and Cleaning Both Symbol and Container

Guide the client to examine and clean the symbol in an appropriate way, e.g., wiping it with a cloth or dusting it off. Then clean the container in a similar way. If the container

is a vessel, make sure to clean both the inside and the outside.

### 3.2.2. Putting the Symbol into the Container

Place the cleaned symbol into the container carefully and properly.

### 3.2.3. Securing or Reinforcing the Container

If the container is not secure enough, advise the client to take reinforcing measures to prepare it for moving, such as locking the wooden box that holds the stone.

## 3.3. Moving the Container Holding the Symbolic Object

### 3.3.1. Initial Movement

Start from a close distance.

A. Ask the client to imagine placing the container in front of him/her, pause for a moment, and observe it.

B. Tell the client to move the container 1m → 3m → 1m in front of him/her, pausing between each movement, and then return it to its original position. Repeat this 1-2 times.

### 3.3.2. Visible Movement

Within the range of visibility, move the container back and forth at different distances.

A. Perform 3-5 movements initially, then ask the client if there is a perfect distance, and move it approximately 10 times. 1m → 5m → 10m → 5m → 10m → 20m (perfect distance) → 30m → 20m → 10m → 1m.

B. Move about 10 times to the farthest visible point, and ask the client to confirm the distance. 1m → 10m → 30m → 20m → 50m → 100m (farthest point) → 50m → 30m → 10m → 20m → 10m → 1m.

### 3.3.3. Beyond-Visibility Movement

Move the container to an infinitely far distance where it disappears.

A. 1m → 10m → 30m → 20m → 50m → 100m → 50m → 1000m → infinitely far.

B. Pause at the infinitely far distance (1-3 minutes) and experience calm, rest, emptiness, and a quiet mind.

C. Gradually move the container back. E.g.: infinitely far → 1000m → 100m → 50m → 100m → 20m → 10m → 3m → 10m → 3m → 1m.

## 3.4. Assessing Efficacy Based on Changes in the Symbol and Container

1) Move the container back in front of the client.

Ask the client to closely observe any changes in the appearance of the container, like size, weight, colour, shape, material, condition, etc., and describe them specifically.

2) Tell the client to open the container and carefully examine any changes in the symbolic object, such as size, weight, form, nature, etc., and describe them specifically.

3) Ask the visitor about any changes in their physical and emotional feelings, including changes in the affected body part, overall emotional changes, and changes in their understanding and attitude towards the problem; describe specifically.

4) Re-measure the impact of the problem and mark it on Record Sheet B.

### 3.5. Draw the Symbolic Object and Container After Movement

1) Use Record Sheet B, same as 2.5.

2) The therapist fills in the relevant content on Record Sheet B.

## 4. Effectiveness Criteria

### 4.1. Qualitative

Table 1. Qualitative Effectiveness Criteria

Symbolic object	Container	Target Problem
completely disappeared	Empty	Resolved
shrunk, deformed, etc.	N/A	Reduced
completely transformed into another object	N/A	The nature has changed

### 4.2. Quantitative

Table 2. Quantitative Effectiveness Criteria

A	B	Effectiveness
any number	0	Completely Solved
7	3 or lower	Significantly Effective
7	5 or lower (inclusive)	Effective
8 or 9	4 or lower	Significantly Effective
8 or 9	6 or lower (inclusive)	Effective
10	5 or lower	Significantly Effective
10	7 or lower (inclusive)	Effective

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chronic stress responses]. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 21(3), 450-454.

## Move to Emptiness Record Sheet (A)

NAME:

GENDER:

DATE:

Influence of the Problem

No  
Influence

Strongly  
Influenced

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Symbol of the Target Problem

Please draw the picture here.

Name

Amount

Colour

Size

Other

Container to the Symbol of Problem

Please draw the picture here.

Appearance of the Container  
(the more, the better, at least three)

Length (cm)

Width (cm)

Height (cm)

Weight (kg)

Material

Hardness

Texture

Lustre

Smell

Style

Shape

Colour

Decoration

Key to the lock

Other

## Move to Emptiness Record Sheet (B)

NAME:

GENDER:

DATE:

Influence of the Problem

No  
Influence

Strongly  
Influenced

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Changes in the Symbolic Object

Please draw the picture here.

Name  
Amount  
Colour  
Size  
Other

Changes in the Container

Please draw the picture here.

Appearance of the Container  
(the more, the better, at least three)

Length (cm)  
Width (cm)  
Height (cm)  
Weight (kg)  
Material  
Hardness  
Texture  
Lustre  
Smell  
Style  
Shape  
Colour  
Decoration  
Key to the lock  
Other

Personalized Events During the Process (Therapist Only)