

Box 5.1 *Zhi mian*: Directly facing reality

'The real warrior dares to face life as it is, no matter how gloomy it might be; and to look unflinchingly at the scene, no matter how blood drenched it might be.' This description of *zhi mian*, or 'directly facing reality', comes from Lu Xun, a leading figure of modern Chinese literature (Wang, 2016). The concept has been adopted by Xuefu Wang, a Nanjing-based psychotherapist, and colleagues at the Zhi Mian International Institute of Existential-Humanistic Psychology, as a means of developing an indigenous Chinese therapy that has many links to the existential-humanistic field (Hoffman, 2009; Wang, 2011). *Zhi mian* therapy draws on the work of Lu Xun, and aims to help clients face their reality and to get to know the 'truth' of life (cf. van Deurzen, Chapter 7, this volume). It encourages clients to be authentic and to fiercely resist those forces that obstruct their growth, yet at the same time to develop their gentle, loving capabilities.

Lu Xun gives the analogy of an iron house to describe those social systems that claim to provide meaning for people, but are actually their shackles (cf. Heidegger's *the One*, discussed on p. 30): 'Imagine an iron house having not a single window and virtually indestructible, with all its inmates asleep and about to die of suffocation. Dying in their sleep, they won't feel the pain of death' (cited in Wang, 2009: 153–154). But he goes on to ask, 'Now if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn? But if a few wake up, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house.' Lu Xun was determined to shout and bang on the outside of the house; and although, here, he was referring to an awakening of the Chinese people from a perceived cultural slumber, the same analogy could be used for the role of the existential therapist; that is, that our clients, in the fallenness of their everyday lives, are entrapped in the iron house and slowly suffocating to death. To awaken them to their existential condition will, by no means, feel comforting for them, but it calls them back to reality, and provides them with an opportunity to make the most of their lives.