

## **Applying Research in Culture-Oriented Psychology to Life and Counselling, to Empirically Oriented Research, and to Theory-building: Replies to Professors Chou, Zhou, Yeh, and Hwang**

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### **Abstract**

The four commentaries orient us towards the ways in which culture-oriented psychology research may be applied: life and counselling, empirical research and collaboration, and theory-construction. Professors Chou and Zhou focus their attention on how Confucianism may be applied to counselling and inspiring meaningful research. My orientation to Confucianism extends from New Confucianism, a movement dedicated to revitalizing spiritual Confucianism, especially its ontology of the moral mind. However, I use this in concert with Bhaskar's notion of an open system. This openness is central to my replies to Professors Yeh and Huang, whose focus is on the research aspects of my target article. The process of finding a conceptual counterpart is central to their approach to internationalizing theories that stem from indigenous psychology. Nevertheless, based on Bhaskar, I argue the importance of theorizing the actual layer, that is, the cultural layer between institutions and collective memory (including lieux de mémoire). The same conditioning of a generative force can produce different observed phenomena in qualitatively different eras. Conceptual counterparts can be theorized as parts of the actual layer of a particular culture or society in a given era. Even if they stem from the same generative (causal) force, they may condition different expressions of behaviors in different cultures.

*Keywords: Confucian psychology, critical realism, ontology of the moral mind; lieux de mémoire; relational ethics*

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I am very grateful to the editors of Journal of Indigenous Counseling Psychology, Chih-Hung Wang and Jia-Ling Luo, for providing this opportunity for me to engage in dialogue with four excellent Chinese scholars around the process of writing culture-oriented psychology journal articles, and also how to apply these to various facets of our working lives. The four commentaries orient us towards different ways that research in culture-oriented psychology can be applied: in life and counselling, in empirically oriented research and collaboration, and in theory-building. I address each of these in turn.

I especially appreciate the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with Chou Wen-Mei, who has worked as a marriage and family therapist in the United States, and is now Professor and Coordinator of the Marriage and Family Child Counseling (MFCC) program at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Texas. Given that many readers of this journal will be more oriented towards counselling and teaching than journal article writing, her comments are especially helpful here. As she observes, the reflexive nature of the *Analects*, oriented towards self-refinement and cultural cultivation, is something that makes Confucian Psychology effortlessly modern and capable of supporting culturally hybrid practices (see S. H. Liu, 2000, 2003) in such domains as counselling. The Chinese have been practicing reflexivity for thousands of years. It is in the first page of the *Analects*. Confucianism has had many productive encounters with Buddhism over the course of two millennia, leading to a revitalized practice of Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties (see Ch 7, S. H. Liu, 1998).

It was inspiring to see how she could adapt the “sandwich model” (which I had invented to teach journal article writing to my graduate students) to the process of opening, conducting, and closing therapeutic counselling with a client. These are a beautiful reminder that to thrive, Confucian Psychology has to become more engaged with the daily issues of people living their daily lives. Her experiences as an overseas Chinese, adapting to a Western context while retaining adaptive aspects of her cultural heritage in her work, might be similar to my own life experiences as an overseas Chinese. She was easily able to apply the holistic principles of Confucian Psychology to her everyday professional duties, which are vastly different than mine.

Dr. Zhou De-Hui also appreciated my use of metaphor in constructing sandwich and cocktail party examples to teach my students how to write papers, but she added that each person is likely to follow their own path, through another apt metaphor, the allegory of ox herding. This is used to communicate the process of enlightenment in Buddhist temples; Dr. Zhou likens it to herding ideas into a publishable form that ultimately benefits both the person and society. The use of the ten oxen to symbolize and communicate meaning in Dr. Zhou’s example remind me of Pierre Nora’s (1996) concept of *lieux de mémoire* (*sites of memory*) as

“complex things. At once natural and artificial, simple and ambiguous, concrete and abstract, they are *lieux*- places, sites, causes- in three senses: material, symbolic, and functional” (p. 14). The act of visiting a Buddhist temple with the *lieu* of the oxen reminds worshippers of central tenets of their religion, thus bringing material to life in a symbolic role serving the function of religious observance. It warms my heart to see that Dr. Zhou is able to join up her research, cultural upbringing, and teaching through use of *lieux de mémoire*. For the more that counselling and psychotherapy is able to align itself with the materials and symbolic practices of clients’ everyday lives, the more effective it will be. Buddhism is still the most popular religion in Taiwan, and the second most popular religion in Hong Kong. This is the essence of a more practical indigenous psychology, that I have long argued will be central to the long-term health of both IP, and New Confucianism (Liu, 2014), which is an open intellectual movement can be fused to other cultural traditions (S. H. Liu, 2000).

Dr. Zhou would have gotten along well with my Father, who loved Zhu Xi, and was an accomplished Zhu Xi scholar (e.g. S. H. Liu, 1989). Zhuzi elevated *The Great Learning* to the status of one of the Four Books used in entry examinations for dynastic officials. He successfully synthesized Buddhist influences into a resolutely Confucian approach to philosophy. Ironically, one of his original intents, which was to simplify the Classics used to teach Confucianism to make it easier for ordinary people to learn, was over the centuries perverted into a form of rigidly conservative scholasticism. By the early Qing dynasty, the Four Books had become part of a canon of ritualism, purism, and classicism (Chow, 1996), dividing the scholar-gentry class from the rest of Chinese society, and increasingly, from prevailing life conditions as the Qing dynasty began to fail. The New Confucianism movement my Father (see Bresciani, 2001) identified with reacted against the stultifying conservatism of Qing dynasty Confucianism. As a consequence, I have paid far less attention to *The Great Learning* compared to either *The Analects* (my favorite) or *Mencius*. This is in part because *The Great Learning* provides a more complete ontology and overt theory of Confucianism as a political philosophy than those other two great works: but as a largely totalizing and closed system that does not encompass science, technology, and democratic institutions, its treasured ontology of the moral mind ossified into a political dogma that was utterly incapable of facing up to the challenge of Western military imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I prefer the openness of New Confucianism (S. H. Liu, 2000), whose notion of human-heartedness (仁) forms the core of my approach to both global consciousness (Liu & MacDonald, 2016) and relational ethics (Hopner & Liu, 2020).

Now that the rest of the world has used other means to catch up to the West in terms of

science and technology, the current paramount leader of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping (2014), has called for a return to indigenous cultural roots as a renewed source of legitimate power. But in Chairman Xi's speeches, I do not see an emphasis on concern for every life, as in the articulation of the five virtues that is prominent in Dr. Zhou's commentary. She uses Confucianism deftly, as part of the weave of her scholarly practices, that are simultaneously respectful of both modernity and tradition. By contrast, present day understanding of Confucianism in the PRC is fragmented and implicit (Xie, Chen et al., 2021; Xie, Zhou et al., 2021), because the *lieux de mémoire* dedicated to maintaining Confucianism as a ruling ideology during the dynastic periods have been ruptured (and dismantled). It will take more than a few speeches by Chairman Xi and the establishing of a few hundred Confucian Institutes abroad to revitalize Confucianism to become more of a living philosophy today. Even Taiwan is not immune from its Confucian culture losing its vitality.

The reinvigoration of New Confucianism (Bresciani, 2001) through greater attention to the concerns of everyday life was something my Mother and I thought would be of great benefit: but much as we encouraged him, it was not something my late Father (Liu Shu-Hisen) was willing and able to undertake. So, the potential for renewal in this task must be left to a meeting of future minds, outside their usual comfort zones of social interaction. I'm glad to have delayed publication of the target article and my response, awaiting this encounter with new voices, so astute in their observations of how Confucianism can work today, both in counselling, and in inspiring meaningful research. Thank you for your comments, Professor Chou and Associate Professor Zhou.

By contrast to Professors Chou and Zhou, whom I've never met in person, I have known Professor Yeh Kuang-Hui for a quarter of a century. We are about the same age (which is not young). So, I can easily appreciate where we converge or diverge in our thinking. I was born in Taiwan, but only lived there the first four years of my life, and then again for 6 months on sabbatical in 2002. Outside of regular visits to Taiwan, China, or Hong Kong, I live inside English speaking environments. I habitually think and converse in English, and so I am best equipped to play a facilitating role in the development of indigenous Chinese psychology. My life experiences orient me towards cross-cultural thinking. As a native Chinese speaker who has lived his life mainly in Chinese speaking environments, Professor Yeh's advice on developing indigenous Chinese concepts in research importantly augments what I was able to share in my target article. To articulate a concept familiar to Chinese speakers that is alien to native-English speakers, he recommends finding a conceptual "counterpart" to help communicate this idea. Prof Yeh's insights may resonate with the goals, aspirations, and experiences of other

researchers with a similar background. I certainly agree with his observations. Even in the narrow conceptual space of the commentary on my target article, Professor Chou's take on Confucian Psychology adopts a different counterpart (i.e. reflexivity in counselling) for communicating about Confucian ideas regarding self-cultivation compared to Professor Yeh's observations about the benefits of learning from peer reviews in the publication process. By his choice of counterpart, Professor Yeh's reflections on self-cultivation necessarily become more critical and effortful compared to Professor Chou's more expansive comments on the ability of one to grow as a counsellor. Thus, choice of a conceptual counterpart shapes the effective communication of an idea, across cultures and professional life-settings.

In this process of communicating across different cultural spaces, alliances between researchers of different backgrounds can be helpful for advancing indigenous psychology on the global stage. Professor Yeh's long-time collaboration with Olwen Bedford provides a rich illustration of this (for a review, see Bedford & Yeh, 2019). Over the decades, their work on filial piety has evolved from being a mono-cultural theory of indigenous Chinese psychology into a more general model of intergenerational relationships and elder care that can be applied at the individual, structural, societal, and cross-cultural levels. According to the dual filial piety model (DFPM), the Confucian principles of favoring the intimate and respecting the superior provide the basis for a two-dimensional conceptual model of intergenerational family relationships. This conception originated in ancient China, and is distinct from theories originating from the West, but now can be applied anywhere in the world, just as Western theories have been applied to non-Western societies. They today conceptualize the concept of filial piety as a *contextualized personality construct*, that situates personality within culturally inscribed social roles. Because different cultures have different ideals, the DFPM is able to make culturally sensitive predictions in different societies, indexed according to how much emphasis they place on reciprocal compared to authoritarian filial piety. They have begun a promising dialogue between the originally Chinese concept of filial piety and the originally Western concept of attachment theory (Bedford & Yeh, 2019, p. 8-9), both of which can be read as 2-dimensional models of parent-child relationships. It is gratifying to see the thoughts of a primarily indigenous psychologist converging with those of a primarily cross-cultural psychologist over time, even though our starting points and developmental pathways were distinct.

At the deeper level, I wonder how the principles of favoring the intimate and respecting the superior fit into the transcendental structures of self and social exchange relationships articulated in the culture-inclusive theories of the final commentator, Professor Hwang Kwang-

Kuo. Theoretically, Yeh and Hwang have followed similar arcs, starting from indigenous Chinese psychology and moving towards more culture-general or culture-inclusive theories. But I have not seen a paper where Professor Hwang has attempted to articulate the connections between his own work and that of Professor Yeh. Professor Yeh cites Professor Hwang more than vice versa.

Professor Hwang began by conceptualizing social exchange through a conceptual model of face and favor, focused on an understanding of the social obligations that have characterized the unequal social relationships prevalent in Chinese society. Over the decades, this has evolved into a more culture inclusive (or culture systems) approach, as he began to claim that this structure has transcendental properties (that exist independently of our experience of it in time and space, and provide a deep structure for surface manifestations of culture and culture change anywhere): “the Confucian ethical system is the transcendental formal structure for sustaining the lifeworld’s of Chinese people and might be applied in any kind of social interaction with another party of various relationships” (Hwang, 2018).

Unlike Professor Yeh, Professor Hwang has not established a long-term alliance with another researcher having a different background and skills, to carry his research to a wider audience<sup>1</sup>. Most of his work is solo authored. His model remains largely theoretical. It has not inspired much empirical research, and has only attracted some dialogue (with predominantly qualitative, post-modern theorists) outside his original base of support in indigenous psychology. His work on a culture-inclusive system have not been widely cited. One reason may be their relative neglect of empirical findings. There are times when I think of Professor Hwang as a Kantian transcendental idealist, rather than a true disciple of Bhaskar’s critical (or transcendental) realism. To be critical realist requires that one pay *some* attention to empirical results in the on-going process of making defensible/persuasive claims about potentially transcendental structures. The explanatory power of theory must be stretched over time to accommodate new observations of phenomena. So, while I agree that the *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology* is fragmented, I have yet to see evidence (or even persuasive arguments) that Professor Hwang’s theories provide the framework for unifying the disparate research presented in its many chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> While I thank Professor Hwang for mentioning the centrality of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (AASP) to my career, it is incorrect to assert that I am part of its original “Gang of Four”. In fact, Professor Susumu Yamaguchi was the original member of the “gang of four”, not me: his contributions in bringing the Japanese Group Dynamics Association into AASP were absolutely central to its early success (see the AASP website for an historical account). I could be regarded as one of the “Five Phases” (五行) of AASP, for those readers who enjoy such word play.

Obviously, claims that your model has a transcendental structure cannot be verified empirically, nor can this be falsified. *But for the model's proponent, a wider program of research, as outlined by Lakatos (1970) is required to be persuasive:* “The basic unit of appraisal must be not an isolated theory or conjunction of theories but rather a 'research programme', with a conventionally accepted (and thus by provisional decision 'irrefutable') 'hard core' and with a 'positive heuristic' which defines problems, outlines the construction of a belt of auxiliary hypotheses, foresees anomalies and turns them victoriously into examples, all according to a preconceived plan” (p. 99). Generative, perhaps counter-intuitive predictions or explanations would be among the signal components of such an approach. “A research programme is said to be progressing as long as its theoretical growth anticipates its empirical growth, that is, as long as it keeps predicting novel facts with some success ('progressive problemshift'); it is stagnating if its theoretical growth lags behind its empirical growth, that is, as long as it gives only post-hoc explanations either of chance discoveries or of facts anticipated by, and discovered in, a rival programme ('degenerating problemshift ')" (p. 100, Lakatos, 1970). In the methodology proposed by Lakatos (1970), one must pay attention not only to empirical results, but to alternative and rival theories to make progress. Whereas I can see evidence of progress in Bedford and Yeh's (2019) latest iteration of the DFPM, I can see no similar evidence of progress in the face and favor and mandala models. They appear to have stagnated.

Professor Hwang and I have argued about the correct relationship between empirical and theoretical research for many years. Hence, I do not foresee that either one of us will be able to persuade the other about the merit of his point of view anytime in the near future. But my question for him, in the context of the present dialogue, is how do his culture-inclusive theories shed generative light on the mature work of Professors Yeh and Bedford on the DFPM? Given their shared origins in Chinese indigenous psychology, he should be able to do this succinctly, and bring new empirical observations and ancillary hypotheses to enrich the scope of this theory. Both Kuang-hui and myself are in the vicinity of 60, which is a propitious age for achieving realizations according to Confucian theory:

「吾十有五而志於學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不逾矩。」 <At fifteen, I made up my mind to pursue learning. At thirty, I was firm in my path. At forty I had no more doubts. At fifty I understood the decree of heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned for hearing truth. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desires, without transgressing what is right.> *The Analects*, Ch.2, v.4.

I am certainly willing to listen, and I hope that both my ears and those of Professor Hwang are attuned to hearing truth. While we agree that critical realism is an appropriate

philosophy of human science (Hwang, 2022; Liu, 2017), neither of us is complete in our ability to apply Bhaskar's theory of the three-layered stratification of reality to our work. Any psychologist must pay some attention to the layer of phenomena, but I pay much more attention to the results of empirical research than Professor Hwang. The sharpest difference between us, however, is the relative emphasis we give to the two less visible layers in Bhaskar's theory. I focus on the layer of the actual, that includes the historical trajectories that anchor visible phenomena of the present in collective remembering of the past, including institutional and cultural artefacts that afford, facilitate and constrain visible phenomena to certain times and places (Liu, 2017). Professor Hwang focuses on the layer of the real, the generative powers that are the deep source (or enduring transcendental structure) of both the layer of the actual and visible phenomena. Because Professor Hwang appears to have no layer of the actual in his theory, he has not been able to articulate how changes in institutional structures and cultural beliefs over time moderate and mediate the relationship between deep structure and phenomena in his theory. As I have mentioned earlier, these institutional changes are essential for understanding the fate of Confucianism after the demise of the last imperial dynasty of China in 1911. The structure of Chinese society that originated the game of face and favor so elegantly theorized by Professor Hwang in 1987 is not the same structure that the Communist Party of China rules (and reconstructs) today- China is economically much more open now than it was then. Where is the morphogenesis in Professor Hwang's theory? How can you theorize about morphogenesis without theorizing about the layer of the actual?

As for me, I admit that my training in British and American empiricism makes me reluctant to follow the challenge of Bhaskar to attempt impossible to verify claims that my own theory provides a transcendental structure for human social relations or political psychology. In my field of specialization, collective remembering (Liu, 2022), I use Bhaskar's (1975/2008) concept of the stratification of reality to claim that collective memories (or social representations of history) constitute a layer of the actual that provides symbolic resources that facilitate or constrain visible psychological phenomena in experiments or surveys. I argue that the making of political cultures is contingent on people's experiences of recent history, and their institutionalized memories of their foundational past- like *lieux de mémoire*. Together, these make a layer of the actual that anchors visible psychological phenomena (like prejudice, willingness to cooperate, or go to war) to enduring cultural habits and society's institutions. This allows me to make predictions about culture level moderation of psychological phenomena, and to make predictions about political culture change.

In contrast to Professor Hwang's approach of seeking for transcendental structures, I



claim that the form of collective remembering today is conditioned by mass media, and subject to manipulation by political leaders seeking to use history as a justification of their own petty political projects (see the following transcript of Vladimir Putin's speech that opens with a historical justification for his decision to invade Ukraine, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>, and Liu and Khan, 2014 for theory explaining how political leaders use history as a means to justify their ends). However, at the same time, I doubt that even the most important structure, responsible for producing the most phenomena in this literature, the "nation-state", should be conceptualized as transcendental. Many scholars locate the origins of the nation-state in time of the French revolution. I claim that relational structures, like the Confucian idea of benevolent authority (consistent with Professor Hwang's face and favor model), were more typical formulations of legitimate power in Imperial China, but today, work in concert with modern imported ideas like nationalism (see Gries, 2004; Liu et al., 2010).

Only in my most recent book (Liu, 2022), summarizing more than two decades of research did I propose that a yin-yang dialectic could be employed in a generative manner in the area to structure research on collective remembering. Even then, I made no claims about its transcendental structure. But it can certainly be inferred that for me, the cosmology of yin-yang provides a transcendental structure that implicitly holds together much of my work. I admit that I could improve my own scholarship in this area. But perhaps transcendental discernment is something best left to people of refinement in their 70's, who can follow their hearts desires without transgression.

I only wish to see how Professor Hwang's theories (that are focused more on interpersonal than intergroup and political phenomena) add generative value to work such as mine in political psychology. What I have read from Professor Hwang so far is mostly criticism<sup>2</sup>, a part of what critical (or transcendental) realism demands: but this neglects the more complete story of generative powers. Perhaps on my next visit to Taiwan, we should convene a workshop in Kaoshiung, where we take enough time to see if a middle ground can be constructed for mutual benefit, and for the advance of indigenous psychology and human science. But this would require prior investment by myself, Professor Hwang, and Professor Yeh, to provide target presentations that lift this initial conversation to the more sophisticated level of a potentially forwards-looking engagement. Perhaps Professors Chou and Zhou could serve as moderators, counsellors, and peacemakers when our differences become intractable. How about

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<sup>2</sup> His misplaced criticism of our recent Special Issue on Confucian Psychology, for example, makes me wonder how carefully he read the articles. While they *describe* the fragmented nature of the understanding and influence of Confucianism on Chinese societies today, they *theorize* manifestations of the ontology of the moral mind, which is the transcendental structure claimed by New Confucianism, see Liu (2021).

this, Professors Wang and Luo: can you make this happen?

In closing, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to read, enjoy, and argue with Professors Chou, Zhou, Yeh, and Hwang, esteemed colleagues from places distant from where I live, who have devoted their energies to reading and writing about my target article. We have veered some distance from simply offering advice to psychologists seeking to publish culture-oriented research in academic journals. But I hope this detour has been a worthwhile intellectual journey nonetheless.

I close in offering a tribute to my four commentators, and to other cherished colleagues whom I have not been able to see for more than two years, while my home country of New Zealand has had its borders closed due to COVID-19. The first saying of Confucius in the *Analects* is thus the most appropriate final word in this on-going dialogue:

「學而時習之，不亦說乎？有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎？人不知而不慍，不亦君子乎？」<It is a pleasure to acquire knowledge, and put into practice what you have learned. A greater pleasure it is when friends of congenial mind come to visit you from afar. But a person of noble character feels no discomposure when they go unnoticed.> *The Analects*, Ch.1, v.1.

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## 文化取向心理學應用於日常生活與諮商、實徵性取向研究、與理論建構： 對周文玫、周德慧、葉光輝與黃光國教授的回應

劉豁夫\*

### 摘要

這四則回應為我們指明了不同方式的文化導向心理學研究適用於哪些領域：日常生活與諮商、實徵性取向研究與合作、與理論建構。兩位周教授將注意力集中於該如何將儒家思想應用於諮商與意義性研究的啟發。我對儒學的方針取自於新儒家，一個致力於振興精神儒學的運動，尤其是道德心靈本體論的概念，而我將其理念與巴斯卡的開放體系概論一同運用。這種開放式理念是我對葉教授和黃教授回應的核心，他們更注重於我目標文章的研究詳情。尋找概念對應物的步驟是源於本土心理學中理論國際化的核心。跟隨巴斯卡的理論，我主張關於實際層理論化的重要性，也就是制度與集體記憶（包括記憶所繫之處）的文化層。它以相同的生成力量為條件，於不同性質的時代來打造不同的觀察現象。概念對應物可以被理論化為特定時代中，一個特定文化或社會所產生的實際層的一部分。就算它們源於同一個生成（因果）力量，它們在不同文化中可能制約不同的行為出現。

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