

# **Indigenization and Beyond: Methodological Relationalism in the Study of Personality Across Cultural Traditions**

**David Y. F. Ho**

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Si-qing Peng**

Peking University, Beijing, China

**Alice Cheng Lai**

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

**Shui-fun F. Chan**

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**ABSTRACT** A brief intellectual history of the indigenization movement in Asia leads to the thesis that the generation of psychological knowledge is culture dependent. Indigenous psychologies go further and insist on viewing a target group from the natives' own standpoint. Psychological decentering underlies conceptions of human existence rooted in Asian intellectual traditions, in particular, relatedness between persons predominates in Confucianism. These conceptions demand new approaches to knowledge generation that signify a paradigmatic shift from methodological individualism to methodological

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Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to David Y. F. Ho, Department of Psychology, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Email: dyfho@hkusua.hku.hk

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relationalism. An implication is that relationships precede situations in the study of personality and social behavior. We define personality as the sum total of common attributes manifest in, and abstracted from, a person's behavior directly or indirectly observed across interpersonal relationships and situations over time. We rely on the notion that there are identifiable levels of cognition to develop a metatheoretical framework for reconstructing selfhood. Confronting the subject-object dichotomy opens the door to investigations of transcendent consciousness; confronting the self-other demarcation underlying Western theories leads to the construction of self-in-relations.

“Do unto others as what *others* would have you do unto them”—The Golden Rule restated.

This article is an attempt to answer several questions: What is indigenous psychology? Why should psychologists in the West be concerned with it? More importantly, how does indigenous psychology lead to new ways of knowledge generation in the study of personality? To answer these questions, we explore how indigenous conceptions of human existence lead to new conceptions and methodologies for theory construction. Going beyond indigenization, we argue for a paradigmatic shift from methodological individualism to methodological relationalism. Based on relational conceptions, we attempt to reconstruct selfhood informed by Asian traditions. We confine our analysis to indigenization rooted in four Asian intellectual traditions, Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism), Buddhism, and Hinduism. For more extensive coverage, the reader is referred to Ho (1995, 1998), Kim and Berry (1993), Paranjpe, Ho, and Rieber (1988), and Sinha (1997).

Previously, Ho (1998) defined an indigenous psychology as “the study of human behavior and mental processes within a cultural context that relies on values, concepts, belief systems, methodologies, and other resources indigenous to the specific ethnic or cultural group under investigation” (p. 94). Indigenous resources may be applied at different points in the entire knowledge-generation process. This definition makes clear that indigenous psychology is characterized by the conceptions and methodologies rooted in an ethnic or cultural group employed to generate knowledge, not merely by the body of knowledge it obtains about the group in question. The challenge facing indigenous psychologies, then, is to demonstrate how they are indeed informed by, rooted in, or derived from their respective indigenous cultures. A more demanding task is to demonstrate how they may enrich mainstream psychology.

## Indigenization

### A Brief Intellectual History

Filipino psychologists were the first to champion the cause of indigenization in Asia (Ho, 1998). *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology) became a visible movement by the 1970s, under the leadership of the late Virgilio Enriquez (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Since the 1980s, other energetic centers of indigenization have appeared, notably in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and India. Discontent with the status quo, both political and intellectual, underlies the motivation for indigenization. Politically, the indigenization movement is a reaction to the dominance of Western, especially American, psychology. Many Asian psychologists view the wholesale importation of Western psychology into Asia as a form of cultural imperialism that perpetuates the colonialization of the mind. They are concerned with the frightful transformation of Asia (and elsewhere) in the American image. The movement in the Philippines, in particular, is committed to the development of Filipino national identity and consciousness.

Intellectually, indigenous psychologists argue that there is a need to develop conceptual frameworks and methodologies rooted in Asian cultures because much of Western psychology may be irrelevant or inapplicable in Asia. The bias toward individualism in Western theories of personality has been singled out for attack. From both historical and global perspectives, the individualistic mode of social life is not representative of the human experience. The bias has sometimes reached an extreme degree, where the group is no longer regarded as relevant to the analysis of individual behavior. For instance, Dansereau (1989) asserted that, in the case of self-contained individualism, groups “do not influence persons” (p. 959), implying that group-level analysis has no relevance. But how can any person, self-contained or otherwise, be free from the influence of groups? The assertion denies the very social character of human existence.

Typically, the intellectual tools used for theory building are indigenous constructs that reflect the relational character of human existence. Enriquez (1992) identifies *kapwa* (fellow being) as the “core value of the Filipino personality” (p. 60). Unlike the English word *other*, *kapwa* is not used in opposition to the self and does not recognize the self as a separate identity. Rather, *kapwa* is the unity of self and others, and hence implies a shared identity or inner self. From this arises the sense of fellow being

that underlies Filipino social interaction. In a similar vein, Choi, Kim, and Choi (1993) conducted an indigenous analysis of the Korean constructs *woori* (an inclusive group; we or us) and *cheong* (human affection). Their results illustrate a relational mode of the group in which *cheong*, acting like an emotional glue, binds its members together. Another relational construct that has attracted research attention is the Chinese concept of face (Ho, 1994).

Practitioners of indigenous psychology eschew the use of self-report tests, scales, and questionnaires imported from the West. Chiu and Yang (1987) point out that Chinese participants are culturally conditioned to yield to the demands of authority figures (e.g., researchers), but also inhibited in expressing their personal opinions or feelings freely in an unfamiliar social context (e.g., in responding to an imported questionnaire). Feeling trapped, they may comply with the researchers' demands without, however, responding according to their true opinions or feelings. Thus, practitioners tend to favor unobtrusive, nonreactive, naturalistic, and experience-near approaches to data gathering, with sensitivity to local ethos and customs. Probably, such indigenous approaches have been most often articulated and practiced in the Philippines (see Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, for exemplars; also Ho, 1998).

An insider's knowledge of the target culture—which may, nonetheless, be acquired by foreign investigators—is essential to the conduct of investigations. Consider the distinction between the public-outward and the private-inward facets of social behavior in Confucian-heritage cultures. Doi (1973) depicts the Japanese two-fold structure of consciousness in terms of *omote* (outside part) and *ura* (backside part). In investigating Japanese *tatemaie* (public moral standards) and *honne* (true inner feelings), Naito and Gielen (1992) conclude that “the *tatemaie-honne* dualism creates difficulties for adolescents and moral educators, and interferes with effective cross-cultural communication” (p. 161). In Chinese culture, a corresponding dualism would be acting according to external standards (e.g., *liyi*, which means protocol and righteousness) versus internal *zhenqing* (genuine feelings). This dualism reflects a tension between cultural prescription and individual volition, needs, and feelings. A psychological mechanism in response to this tension is affect-role dissociation, which makes it possible for one to perform one's role functions with affective detachment. Without the requisite sensitivity to these behavioral patterns, indigenous psychologists argue, research would result in distortions of social reality.

*Relatives and ancestors.* The issues that indigenous psychologists have raised are not unique. They reverberate movements, past and present, that have arisen to counter prevailing worldviews. Indeed, the indigenization movement itself merits being a case study of intellectual history. Thus, not surprisingly, the indigenization movement has many intellectual ancestors and relatives. One contemporary relative is multiculturalism in the United States. In particular, advocates of culture-specific counseling (e.g., Sue & Sue, 1990) have been vocal in insisting on “culturally appropriate” communication and helping styles for the “culturally different” (i.e., minority groups). However, to insist on having a separate treatment for each distinct group, rather than on client-specific treatment, is theoretically and practically unsound. Misguided multiculturalism, like misguided indigenization, leads to particularism. Culture-specific counseling tends to dwell on differences between groups, at the expense of appreciating similarities between and individual variation within groups. It fails to attend sufficiently to individual differences in enculturation, cultural identification, and cultural orientation. Because of these differences, what is culturally appropriate cannot be predetermined from a knowledge of the client’s culture alone.

A distant intellectual ancestor, mostly unacknowledged, is *Völkerpsychologie* (folk psychology) in Germany more than 200 years ago (Gielen, 2000). Like its modern descendent, *Völkerpsychologie* was sensitive to unique cultural and national identities; it also represented a nationalistic opposition to the political powers of the day (i.e., England and France). But why do we hear little about it nowadays? Because, the movement was amalgamated into, and had become a part of, European culture. We might predict that, in time, its modern descendent will also be integrated into universal psychology. And new movements will make their appearance to challenge the status quo.

*Summation.* Alive in the community of psychologists is a dialectic tension between two tendencies: globalization and indigenization. Globalization without diversity results in boring uniformity; indigenization without unity leads to particularism. At this juncture, indigenization represents a call for diversity. To this extent, it is healthy for the development of psychology. Indigenization is not an end in itself; rather, it is a necessary step toward achieving a synthesis of unity and diversity.

The movement for indigenization has grown during the last two decades. It has now entered into the consciousness of psychologists not

only in the East but also in the West. The fact remains, however, that its impact on mainstream psychology is limited. Publications have limited circulation, partly because of language barriers, making it difficult for them to reach a wider audience. The recent launching of two journals may help to remedy this limitation: The *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* (English language) began publication in 1998, and the *Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies* (Chinese and English) in 2000. Although they do not explicitly espouse indigenization and are international in orientation, these journals offer outlets to articles that are congenial to or have been influenced by the indigenization movement. Still, one deficiency of the movement is that empirical research inspired by indigenous conceptions and methodologies is lacking. Another is that most of the theorizing and empirical work has drawn on Confucianism. Other Asian traditions, such as Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, have not received the attention they deserve. This is unfortunate, because these traditions are pregnant with psychological ideas that, if exploited creatively, promise a major breakthrough in theory development.

Indigenization is not without its critics (Ho, 1998). Following its logic would lead us into the blind alley of particularism—resulting in an unmanageable plethora of psychologies. A more pointed criticism is that indigenous theories are congenitally incomplete; being culture specific, they cannot aspire to be general theories of human thought and action. Moreover, indigenization carries the danger of becoming autochthonous, unreceptive to foreign sources of intellectual nourishment. Indigenous psychologists may fall victim to their own rhetoric, and become as encapsulated and uncreative as the copycat versions of Western psychology they seek to replace. Bearing these criticisms in mind, we propose to help redress the deficiencies of the movement, and to go beyond indigenization.

### The Case for Indigenization

To develop a rationale of indigenization is to confront the question: What is the nature of psychological knowledge? We begin with an acknowledgment: Psychology is the generation of knowledge about human beings by human beings. Unlike the physical sciences, psychology includes investigations in which the subject and object are one. Thus, a psychology of the self is possible. The rationale for indigenization rests

on the following metatheoretical propositions (see Ho, 1998, for a detailed account).

1. The conceptualization of psychological phenomena is, in itself, a psychological phenomenon. As a metalevel phenomenon, it requires further study.
2. The generation of psychological knowledge is culture dependent: Both the conceptualization of psychological phenomena and the methodology employed to study them are informed by cultural values and presuppositions. Accordingly, the role of the knowledge generator cannot be separated or eliminated from the process of knowledge generation.
3. Indigenous psychologies go one step further and insist on viewing a target group from the natives' own standpoint. However, there is no necessity to exclude the views of outsiders. Rather, we adopt a comparative framework with the recognition that reality may be construed in various ways, by insiders as well as by outsiders (see Ho, 1998, for a metatheory of cross-cultural comparisons). In the end, a common ground of understanding between insiders and outsiders has to be achieved for effective intercultural communication. It ranks higher in importance, therefore, than understanding from the natives' point of view.

These propositions invite critical scrutiny of a traditional presupposition in Western psychology, namely, subject-object dichotomy (cf. Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990). This presupposition is manifest in various domains. From the dichotomy between the investigator and the object of investigation comes the conviction that the generation of psychological knowledge is value-free ("objective"), culture transcendent, and independent of the observer. The dichotomy between experimenter and experimental subject conveniently ignores the influence the latter may exercise on the former. The dichotomy between self-as-subject and others-as-object underlies core values in current personality theories: self-other demarcation, individual identity, centrality and sovereignty of the individual self. In the domain of personal experiences, the dichotomy between self-as-subject and self-as-object precludes transcendent consciousness that has been intensely explored in Buddhist and Hindu psychologies (see the *Confronting the subject-object dichotomy* subsection that follows; Ho, 1995; Paranjpe, 1998).

### **Conceptions of Human Existence Indigenous to Asia**

Asian traditions provide fertile soil for conceptions of human existence. As the dominant tradition in China, Japan, and Korea, Confucianism is, above all, an ethic governing human relationships. In Confucian thought, self-cultivation is essential to leading a proper life, achieved through subjugating one's impulses to social propriety and harmonizing one's relationships with others, especially family members. Indigenous to China, Daoism represents the Chinese counterculture. Its ideas pervade people's consciousness in daily life—even among those who have no claim to be Daoists. Daoism champions individuality and individual freedom. It disdains the Confucian affinity to social convention, hierarchical organization, and governmental rule by the scholar class. The good life is the simple life, spontaneous, in harmony with nature, unencumbered by societal regulation, and free from the desire to achieve social ascendancy. In short, it is a life lived in accordance with the Dao—the cosmic principle, timeless, all encompassing, yet nameless and ineffable.

In Vedanta, one of the major systems of Hindu philosophy, the metaphysics of Atman-Brahman monism states that there is one, and only one, reality, called the Brahman: ubiquitous, absolute, formless, immaterial, immutable, without any attributes and hence ineffable (Ho, 1995; Paranjpe, 1998). It is identical to the true self, Atman ("spirit"). In contrast, Buddhist metaphysics denies the ontological reality of the individual self; it rejects any construal of the self, including that of the true self in Hinduism. In Buddhist thought, reality is impermanent and changeable—transient flux in endless cosmic change. Nothing is; everything becomes. The Buddhist conception of reality as ephemeral rather than eternal, and changeable rather than immutable, lies at the heart of its demarcation from Vedanta. Nevertheless, both Hinduism and Buddhism view life as a condition of degradation and misery; both identify the root of this condition as primal ignorance located within the self, not externally in social conditions. Accordingly, their prescriptions for salvation ignore totally any reference to social change.

#### **Relational Conceptions of Selfhood and Identity**

Ho (1995) has given an exposition on selfhood and identity in four Asian intellectual traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

To develop indigenous theories informed by Confucianism, relational constructs are particularly applicable (Ho, 1995, 1998). Relationship dominance refers to the overriding potency of interpersonal relationships, relative to individual and situational factors, as the determinant of social actions. Where relationships predominate, social actions follow not so much from the individual's own volition, sentiments, or needs as they do from the individual's perception of his or her relationships with other people. Relational identity refers to personal identity defined by a person's significant interpersonal relationships. Relational selves are construed as interdependent, not independent from one another, as in individualism. The boundary between self and nonself is not sharply demarcated; the self is not distinct and separate from others, encapsulated unto itself. The relational self is intensely aware of the social presence of others, actual, imagined, or implied. The appearance of others is integral to the emergence of selfhood. In terms of phenomenological representation, self and others are conjointly differentiated from the rest of phenomenal world to form the self-in-relation-with-others.

Conceptions of selfhood in Confucianism and Daoism differ in several important respects (see Ho, 1995). First, the Confucian self is socially defined. The self in Confucianism is a subdued self, conditioned to respond to social requirements and obligations, not to one's own needs and aspirations. However, Confucian thought also speaks of the union of self and heaven as the highest level of personal development; it is an ideal wherein personal desires and social obligations become one. In Daoist thought, the self as an extension of the cosmos is central to the conception of selfhood. Being one of the countless manifestations of the Dao, the self is in harmony with the cosmos, not distinct, standing apart from, or in opposition to it. Second, in Confucianism the others who constitute one's definition of selfhood (the others-in-self) are hierarchically ordered, based on generational rank, gender, and social status. In contrast, Daoism disavows such a hierarchical view of selfhood. To Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu), the fundamental idea is the "equality of all things," because "the great Tao is all-embracing without making distinctions." Third, Confucians do not advocate a dissolution of the self-nonself boundary (except in the sense of abstract union with heaven). They do demand selfhood to be moral and governed by the principle of reciprocity. The Confucian self is malleable through education, but it is not mutable. In contrast, Daoism negates the self-other demarcation. In Zhuangzi's thought, the selfless person thinks of others as "I." Drawing

on Daoist ideas thus leads to the realization that selfhood includes both self-in-other and other-in-self.

The differences between Confucianism and Daoism illustrate the essentiality of not speaking of China, and by extension, Asia in global terms, without due regard for the distinctiveness of its religious-philosophical traditions. Terms like *relational dominance* used by Ho (1998) are meant to capture the essence of human relationships and interaction in Confucian-heritage cultures. When Markus and Kitayama (1991) state that “many Asian cultures have distinct conceptions of individuality that insists on the fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other” (p. 224), the word “many” should read as “not all.” Fundamental relatedness is alien to Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Vedantic metaphysics, in particular, is devoid of any reference to the participation of others in one’s salvation; the realization of the true self, that is, of Atman-Brahman identity, is a purely personal matter. One might ask: If salvation is purely personal, why bother with other people? Would such a doctrine naturally lead to a renunciation of interpersonal involvement and social obligations—that is, to supreme self-centeredness? In this connection, we object to indiscriminately describing Asian cultures as “collectivist.” In the Chinese case, the evidence, derived from both the culture-level and individual-level studies, points to a coexistence of collectivist and individualist tendencies, though not with equal strengths (Ho & Chiu, 1998). This supports the contention that individualism and collectivism are distinct constructs; one is not simply the antithesis of the other. In terms of measurement, the two constructs should not be construed as located at opposite ends of a continuum or continua.

Relational conceptions have allies among contemporary Western theorists. Gergen, a champion of social constructionism, attacks epistemological individualism: The relationship, not the individual, is the locus of knowledge. In *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*, Gergen (1994) states:

There is no inherent demand for identity coherence and stability. The constructionist view does not consider identity, for one, as an achievement of mind, but rather, of relationship. And because one stands in shifting relationships to a multiplicity of others, one may or may not achieve stability in any given relationship, nor is there reason across relationships to suspect a high degree of coherence. . .

A fundamental aspect of social life is the *network of reciprocating identities*. Identities . . . are never individual. (pp. 205–209)

Gergen's "soundings in social construction" sound neo-Confucian! The Confucian construction of selfhood is indeed anchored in a "network of reciprocating identities"; but the same cannot be said of constructions informed by Daoism, Buddhism, or Hinduism. We have reservations about the construction of the "self as relationship" on empirical, conceptual, and ethical grounds. The extent to which identity stability and coherence is achieved through time, across persons within cultures, across relationships within persons, or across situations within relationships is a question to be answered through empirical research. Gergen's (1994) own view is that "a well-formed narrative is typically one in which the characters (or objects) in the story possess a continuous or coherent identity across time" (pp. 191–192). Moreover, culturally defined relationships, with attributes that are structural, enduring, and invariant across situations, would impose stability by virtue of their potency in governing how persons in these relationships should interact with each other. An exemplar is the definition of the father-son relationship according to filial precepts in Confucianism.

Where is the self in "self as relationship"? The "self as relationship" says that the self is construed as relationship. This invites a host of intractable conceptual difficulties that may be avoided without compromising the thesis of social constructionism. The construction of the self entails relationship, but it cannot be reduced to relationship. From a dialectical vantage point, self and relationship derive their meaning from each other. We have argued that relationship inheres in constructions of selfhood. But we are concerned with the ethical ramifications of any construction that reduces the self to relationship. In the extreme, relationship dominance in Confucian-heritage cultures becomes relationship tyranny, suffocating individuality. As witnesses to such tyranny, we recoil at the thought of the self as relationship and wish to reaffirm the self in self-in-relations.

### Psychological Decentering

A distinctive feature common to Eastern conceptions of selfhood is psychological decentering, a key to freeing oneself from egoism and prejudices. In Confucianism, the principle of reciprocity extends the

consideration for oneself to the consideration for others. The Confucian Golden Rule states: “Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.” Reciprocity should be distinguished from empathy. In reciprocity, the consideration for others is based on the consideration for oneself. In empathy, it is based on a perception of others’ consideration for themselves; the consideration for oneself is suspended. Reciprocity is an extension of one’s own self-understanding to understand others. Empathy is understanding others through perceiving the self-understanding of others. The Golden Rule would be restated, “Do unto others as what *others* would have you do unto them.”

Daoism comes much closer to the idea of empathy and is more radical than Confucianism in its stance toward combating egoism. To Zhuangzi, the mind of the sage is like a mirror. The selfless, by seeing through all dichotomies, including self and other, is able to “mirror things as they are.” Zhuangzi says: “The utmost man has no self”; “Exercise fully what you have received from nature without any subjective viewpoint. In one word, be absolutely vacuous.” One may discern a parallel with the stance of universal doubt or *epoche* (from the Greek *epokhe* meaning abstention) aimed at avoiding preconceptions.

The concept of selflessness—more precisely, selfless-self, not to be confused with absence of self—thus lies at the core of Daoism. In this regard, Daoism parallels Buddhism and Hinduism. The Buddhist renunciation of selfhood aims to destroy the mother of all illusions. Because the illusion of selfhood is the root of egoism, overcoming it brings forth insight into the true nature of things. Like Zhuangzi, Buddhists use the mirror as a symbol of the empty mind, purified of prejudices. Here, emptiness means the mind empty of the self and its cravings, not nonexistence of mind. The Vedantic deconstruction of the ego requires a relentless self-examination that involves repeatedly attacking one’s dearly held construals of oneself and the world, so as to loosen their grip on the ego (Paranjpe, 1998). As claimed by both Buddhists and Hindus, the transcendent state of consciousness, being transcognitive and hence freed from prejudices, enables one to attain higher or even “perfect” knowledge.

To be selfless is to be decentered—an effective antidote to cognitive biases and prejudices. In this regard, the notions of psychological decentering embodied in Asian intellectual traditions have pivotal significance in contemporary construals of the self as cognitive schemas upon which one’s knowledge of the world, and indeed one’s life, is organized.

**Beyond Indigenization:  
From Methodological Individualism  
to Methodological Relationalism**

Conceptions of human existence indigenous to Asia demand new methodological approaches to knowledge generation. We discern an emerging paradigmatic shift in personality and social psychology: from methodological individualism to methodological relationalism (Ho, 1998; Ho, Chan, & Zhang, 2001; Ho & Chiu, 1998). Grounded in dialectics and field theory, methodological relationalism is a general conceptual framework for the analysis of thought and action. Although it owes its origin to Asian views reflecting the omnipresence of self-other relations in all social life, methodological relationalism has universal applicability. The reason is that actions always take place in relational contexts, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural variations. Unlike the construct of relational dominance, which is used for culture-specific theorizing, methodological relationalism may be applied to construct pancultural or unified theories of thought and action.

The individual's embeddedness in a network of relations is accorded great emphasis. Actions of individuals must be considered in the context of interpersonal, individual-group, individual-society, and intergroup relations. Furthermore, interpersonal relations themselves must be considered in the context of the other relations. In particular, each interpersonal relationship is subject to the interactive forces of other interpersonal relationships. This consideration introduces the dialectical construct of *metarelation* or *relation of relations*. The domain of metarelations includes the relations of interpersonal, individual-group, individual-society, and intergroup relations. To make a distinction explicit, we say that relational analysis applies to relationships between individuals; metarelational analysis applies to a domain or subdomain of metarelations. Ho, Chan, and Zhang (2001) have argued that metarelational analysis is the signature of a mature Asian social psychology.

Thus, methodological relationalism insists on a prior analysis of relational contexts within which social actions take place. In contrast, analyses based on methodological individualism, even when they take full account of others, begin by presuming the primacy of an inner world of individual experiences and perspectives. Only through this inner world may the outer world in which others reside be comprehended. For instance, Markus and Kitayama (1991) contrast the construal of the self

as independent in American culture with that of the self as interdependent in Asian cultures. These divergent construals have consequences for cognition, emotion, and motivation. Their analysis takes into account how others and self-other relationships are construed. But it is still predicated on understanding social actions through individual cognitive processes, such as the construal of the self. It falls short, therefore, of a fundamental requirement of methodological relationalism—to begin with an analysis of relational contexts, after which—and only after which—may the world of individuals be better understood.

Interpersonal relationships are the most proximate and important of relational contexts, as far as the individual is concerned. They may be defined in different ways, with attributes that are irreducible to those of individuals. Role relationships (e.g., parent-child, husband-wife, and teacher-student dyads) are culturally defined. A taxonomy of role relationships has been developed by McAuley, Bond, and Kashima (2000). Status relationships are sociologically defined, typically based on socioeconomic class. Psychological definitions apply to specific relationships between particular individuals, not to abstract role or status relationships. Specific relationships may be described in terms of psychological dimensions (e.g., trusting-nontrusting). However, these dimensions may not be construed identically across cultures, across socioeconomic strata within the same culture, or even across persons within the same socioeconomic stratum within the same culture. Accordingly, the meanings of descriptive dimensions should be ascertained individually. We must, however, also consider how shared meanings between individuals emerge in the course of interaction. Between dyadic partners, mutual expectations, as well as the anticipation of each other's expectations, play a crucial role. The shared meaning, or intersubjectivity, is the portion that is common to both partners about oneself, the other, and aspects of their relationship. Researchers (e.g., Chiu, Krauss, & Lau, 1998) have documented how shared meanings emerge from dialogic interactions between dyadic partners. These shared meanings encompass, but are distinct from, individual schemas, a construct used in cognitive psychology.

Relational analysis reveals how misleading psychological constructs based on methodological individualism can be. Furby (1979) has criticized the individualistic bias in studies of locus of control. Likewise, we may reexamine the construct of self-efficacy, typically defined as the extent to which a person expects that he or she has the ability to perform adequately in bringing about a desired outcome in a given situation. Thus

defined, self-efficacy is self-perceived personal competence. Regarding self-efficacy as a personality attribute, researchers tacitly assume that respondents to a measure of self-efficacy locate competence within themselves. The difficulty with such a conception is that whether or not one can bring about a desired outcome may depend on factors that have little or nothing to do with personal competence. In the real world, social realities exterior to and beyond control by any single individual often dictate outcomes. Thus, believing in self-efficacy may amount to an inaccurate, distorted perception of reality—in the extreme, to a delusion of grandeur. There is some evidence, in this connection, suggesting that the West feels more invulnerable than the East: Canadians show more unrealistic optimism than Japanese (Heine & Lehman, 1995).

In the context of relationship dominance, having access to the “right” social connections may be far more efficacious than individual actions to reach one’s goals. Thus, we must rethink what is meant by “the ability to perform adequately” and “personal competence.” Performance may have to be gauged by social skills in strengthening and cultivating connections to reach one’s goals; and personal competence may refer to the ability to achieve desired outcomes indirectly through others, not directly through one’s own effort.

### Units of Analysis

Ho (1998) has proposed two analytic units for personality and social psychology, both of which integrate the treatment of persons and relationships. One is person-in-relations, focused on a target person in different relational contexts. The other unit is persons-in-relation, focused on persons interacting within a relational context. This unit may be used when we are interested in how different persons interact within the same target relationship. Music provides a beautiful analogy. A melody is defined by the pattern of notes; a collection of the individual notes, without a pattern, makes no music. One might think of the notes as individuals, and the pattern as the relational context within which they interact. Yet, a musical score on the printed page is dead music; it becomes alive only when its individual notes, each and together, are articulated by performing musicians—a thought to reflect upon when we write our research reports.

The use of person-in-relations puts the emphasis on observing behavior in different interpersonal relationships. Of particular interest are a

person's actions in relation to his or her significant others. Consider, for instance, how a man acts as a son to his parents, a husband to his wife, a parent to his children, a partner in relation to his associates, and so forth. The actions define his social performance in different roles; together, they provide a meaningful way of assessing his personality. Another way is to assess his reactions to others across significant relationships. We submit that actions and reactions toward other people are the most important aspects of behavior for defining personality.

### Personality Defined

From a relational perspective, we define personality as the *sum total of common attributes manifest in, and abstracted from, a person's behavior directly or indirectly observed across interpersonal relationships and situations over time*. This definition embodies a number of important elements. First, as in most other definitions, personality is inferred from observed behavior, as are its constituent attributes. Observations, which may be direct or indirect, are made in different situations and relationships over time. Second, the inference process entails abstraction. That is, attributes common to different observations are identified, abstracted from aspects of the individual's behavior. Third, the definition does not negate personality as a cause of behavior; however, personality is not viewed in terms of immutable traits or dispositions.

Because the same person may behave very differently in different relationships, an adequate assessment of persons requires a strategic consideration: the sampling of both relational contexts and situations within which social interaction is observed. The traditional approach of sampling individuals, situations, and behaviors is inadequate. We propose to follow a three-stage procedure: sampling of (a) persons, (b) relationships nested within each person, and (c) situations and behaviors nested within each relationship. This would clarify how a person behaves differently in the context of different relationships and of different situations within the same relationship. The conditions for when behavior is relationship specific, or situation specific, may be then systematically investigated. An example of theoretical development in this direction is the work of Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1994), who considered the roles played by situational, intrapersonal, and interpersonal factors in social-support interactions; relationship-specific support was differentiated from global support in predictions of adjustment.

Our proposal may help to resolve a key problem in the assessment of personality, known as the *consistency paradox*: Personality ratings tend to be consistent across time and among different observers, but not across situations (Mischel, 1968; see also McAuley, Bond, & Kashima, 2000). Consistency of ratings across situations nested within relationships would increase. In particular, role performance tends to be consistent over time and across situations: For instance, a father is expected to act like a father consistently. Thus, the lack of consistency of personality ratings across situations may disappear when the situations sampled pertain to the same role performance. Still, why consider that there is a paradox in the first place? We view any lack of consistency as freedom inherent in human actions, not as a nuisance in personality assessment. Indeed, a world with perfect consistency (reliability) is a dead, static world.

A different question concerns consistency, or the lack of it, across interpersonal relationships. Available evidence speaking to this point suggests that certain value orientations may be relationship specific. Among Chinese people, one's individualist or collectivist orientation depends on the role relationship involved, and is not predictable from one's global attitudes toward traditional values (Ho & Chiu, 1998). We submit that variation across relationships constitutes an important dimension of personality that deserves greater research attention. Some aspects of social behavior are relationship specific. Sometimes a specific relationship has great power to bring out the best, or the worst, in a person, who may act or react more normally in the context of other relationships. (Most of us have in mind somebody, the apple of someone else's eye, we love to hate.) Other aspects of social behavior are observed in most, if not all, relationships; as such, they are invariant across relationships and pervade the whole of personality. Still other aspects are revealed only in intimate relationships; as such, they define the inner core of personality.

When research is focused on relational contexts, rather than on persons, persons-in-relation is the unit of analysis to be used. We first identify the relational context of interest. This relational context is the basis on which a social unit comprising at least two persons is formed. In this case, the sampling unit is not a single person, but dyads, triads, groups, clans, tribes, and so forth. We may follow a two-stage procedure: sampling of (a) social units (e.g., dyads) formed on the basis of the same relational context (e.g., friendship), and (b) situations and behaviors nested within the same social unit.

Theorists of personality have long recognized the importance of cross-situational observations in assessment. Missing in most of their theorizing, however, is a vital analytic step: consideration of relationships, and situations nested within a given relationship, when we make our observations. In other words, to consider situational variables is not enough. Situational variables are transient in nature; in contrast, interpersonal relationships, once formed, are more enduring. More fundamentally, situational variables cannot be adequately described without reference to their relational context. In particular, reciprocal perceptions and construals of the relationship between interacting parties must be considered because they constitute the most meaningful definition of the situation. In short, the motto of methodological relationalism is: *Relationships precede situations*.

### **Toward a Reconstruction of Selfhood**

Reconstructing selfhood based on Eastern ideas of relational existence and psychological decentering—and meeting scientific requirements—is a formidable challenge. Based on methodological relationalism, we make an attempt at the metatheoretical level. That is, we do not advance a specific theory of selfhood; rather, our aim is to provide a metatheoretical framework for various constructions. We are not without a resource in operationalizing Eastern constructs. That resource may be found in the quintessence of human cognition itself: the capability for metaperception and metacognition essential to dialectical thinking that is unique to human beings. Chinese literature, in which metacognition abounds, offers a starting point. The novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* contains a famous passage in which Kong Ming (Kung Ming), a renowned military strategist, calculates his adversary's calculation taking into consideration Kong Ming's own "cunning" (an instance of meta-metacognition), and accurately predicts the course of action that his adversary takes.

Following Ho and Chiu (1998), we may index complexity in terms of the level of perceptions or cognitive construals identified. Thus, self-perceptions, other-perceptions (i.e., perceptions of other people), and perceptions of relationships are first-level perceptions; metaperceptions are second-level perceptions; perceptions of metaperceptions are third-level perceptions; and so forth. In short, any perception may be itself the object of a higher level perception. Although there is no

theoretical limit to the level of complexity, in practice it would be difficult to handle levels beyond the third or the fourth. The idea that there are levels of cognition parallels the logician's differentiation of different levels of language (Reichenbach, 1947).

### Confronting the Subject-Object Dichotomy

Western self psychology, as stated before, presupposes a dichotomy between the self-as-subject and the self-as-object. In principle, the self-as-subject is the percipient and cannot be perceived (see Paranjpe, 1998, chap. 4, for an extended discussion). At any instant, when perceived, it is no longer the percipient subject: The perceiver-perceiving-itself becomes the object perceived. Self-perception is, therefore, a subject-turned-object regress ad infinitum. We are confronted with a predicament: the inevitability of relying on the self itself to investigate its own nature. That is, the object of investigation is also the instrument for investigation. This predicament was recognized in the *Upanishads* of ancient Hinduism: With what means could the knower be known? Psychoanalytic theory is built on the premise that the self-as-knower (ego) is limited in what it "knows"; moreover, the knower is largely unaware of its ignorance. It has not, however, addressed the more fundamental problem of how to get to know the knower. Aristotle asked a closely related question: Is the speaking tool cognitively neutral (Bain, 1996)? His question is about the nature of the language-tool, anticipating the problem of how language and thought are related in modern psycholinguistics. It confronts us with another predicament: the need to rely on language itself to investigate and communicate with others about its nature. That is, the object of investigation is also the tool for investigation and communication. If indeed the tool is not cognitively neutral, as Bain documents, then thinking about Aristotle's question cannot be independent of language. In principle, then, the answer to the question is not independent of the tool used.

It is impossible to think about all levels of cognition, because the thinking in which we are presently engaged will always be a level higher than the highest level of thinking being thought about. This corresponds to the notion that the language in which we speak will always be a level higher than the highest language spoken about (Reichenbach, 1947, p. 223). Shifting to a higher level of metacognition is automatic, immune to any conscious effort to intervene. That is why the self-as-knower,

mother of knowledge, cannot be directly observed—always beyond reach, yet holding the key responsible for all cognitive activities. We have no idea, for instance, of how we arrive at the answer to a simple arithmetic problem or how we generate the flow of our utterances. The nature of the protocognitive apparatus that generates all forms of knowledge is thus, paradoxically, unknown and unknowable. Some might refer to it as “intuition.” Curiously, for all their rigor, logicians sometimes resort to intuition to detect invalidity (see Kalish & Montague, 1964, for some interesting examples). Although it is characterized by automaticity, intuition is, we submit, experience based. Good intuitive thinkers access automatically, efficiently, and accurately the associative network of organized knowledge accumulated from experiences at their disposal. When pressed, some can even describe the basis upon which their intuition is based. However, when they do so, their intuition becomes a cognitive object. In sum, an epistemological limit is imposed on what we can know. Nevertheless, we might view the subject-turned-object regress, not as a predicament, but as a celebration of human cognition—the capability of forming higher level perceptions *ad infinitum*.

Eastern religious-philosophical traditions negate the subject-object dichotomy in different ways (Ho, 1995; Paranjpe, 1998). In Daoism, the idea that the Dao is unitary implies a negation of all subject-object distinctions. In his assault on analysis, Zhuangzi is insistent on “the equality of all things.” Thinking in terms of dichotomies (“making distinctions”) is arbitrary and ultimately futile. Buddhist and Hindu thought both regard the subject-object dichotomy as an impediment to be overcome and transcended on the way to higher levels of consciousness. At the heart of Buddhist psychology is the notion of transcendent consciousness. In Western psychological terms, transcendent consciousness is an altered state of consciousness, meaning that it is not ordinary, everyday experiencing. Buddhism seeks this very altered state and has elaborated on how it may be achieved through meditation—not medication, as in modern times. In a similar vein, Vedantic transcendentalism describes the center of awareness as a transcognitive, no-thought zone in which there is no knower-known duality.

We anticipate an objection from the scientific community: Transcendent consciousness is privately experienced and cannot be publicly demonstrated; therefore, it cannot be admitted as data. This objection may be met, to begin with, by noting that all of consciousness, transcendent or otherwise, is privately experienced. That has not stopped

psychologists from studying consciousness scientifically. Physiological correlates of transcendent consciousness are publicly demonstrable. For instance, experienced meditators show greater EEG lateral asymmetry than do controls (Bennett & Turner, 1977). Using imaging techniques promises further possibilities. Transcendent experiences may be reported to a public audience. The effects of transcendent consciousness, if any, on the lives of people who experience it are potentially measurable. Dreams, too, offer an opportunity to glimpse, if only indirectly, into the elusive self-as-subject. In dreams, the subject-turned-object regress is particularly rich. The self makes a phenomenal appearance, often in the guise of other actors or split into different selves, under observation by itself. Dreams within a dream may be experienced. Sometimes, while dreaming, the dreamer-as-subject even reminds the dreamer-as-object that “it is only a dream.” At other times, the dreamer-as-subject simply observes what is going on without intervention—like the passive, uninvolved self-as-witness described in Vedanta. In short, although the workings of the process in which consciousness, transcendent or otherwise, is experienced elude direct observation, the products of this process are accessible to scientific investigation. A challenge to investigators is to differentiate “levels of transcendent consciousness” and their correlates, physiological, psychological, and behavioral. But even a successful demonstration does not validate the claim that the subject-object duality vanishes at a high level of transcendent consciousness. We frankly admit that we know of no procedure by which validity could be established.

### Constructing the Self-in-Relations

Confronting the self-other demarcation underlying traditional Western theories of selfhood leads to the construction of self-in-relations. Our approach strives to meet two explicit requirements: (a) to include both self-in-other and other-in-self, and (b) to remain faithful to a conception of human nature that gives full recognition to the whole range of capabilities and potentialities unique to humans. The capacity for self-consciousness has long been regarded as a necessary condition for the emergence of selfhood. We submit that the capacity for other-consciousness is no less a necessary condition. Self and other imply each other—an idea dating back to Daoist thought in ancient China. Self-consciousness and other-consciousness, like twins, are conceived together

(cf. Cooley, 1902/1964), marking a quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness.

In addition, the capacity for metacognition is vital to the development of the social self. Typically, social self is defined in terms of the projection of the self in the public domain—aspects of one's self that a person reveals to others, including one's self-perceptions and metaperceptions. But we must also consider one's social image that is publicly perceived by others, including their metaperceptions of one's self-perception (i.e., what other people think of what one thinks of oneself). That is one way of defining the concept of face (Ho, 1994). Social self and face are thus reciprocal constructs. Needless to say, one's social self is not necessarily congruent with one's face; discrepant perceptions are a source of strain in self-other relationships. Thus the social "presence" of others, real, imagined, or implied, is entered into social calculations. Moreover, this process is bidirectional: One assumes that one's own presence is taken into consideration by others; in the same way, one also assumes that others assume that their presence is considered by oneself. Reciprocity is thus a fundamental feature of social interaction essential to the development of selfhood. Developing a methodology to reflect reciprocity is crucial to theory advancement. Because all actors are both percipient subjects and objects of perception, two approaches to measurement of a target actor are complementary: one focusing on the social self, with the actor serving as informant or respondent; and the other on social image, with others serving as informants.

We may apply the index of complexity described by Ho and Chiu (1998) to analyze self-perceptions and interpersonal perceptions. As an illustration, we consider first the complex nature of the self-concept. This construct may be decomposed into components at various levels of perception (Table 1), each of which may be measured. Thus conceived, the self-concept is clearly more encompassing than has been customarily envisioned. It is a dynamic construct reflecting tensions between component perceptions, which play a pivotal role in the development of the social self.

This conception resonates with Western trains of thought on the self-reflective nature of consciousness. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Cooley (1902/1964, p. 184) uses the metaphor of the "looking glass" to describe how we often see our reflections in the eyes of others, even imagine what they think of us. Decades later, Hilgard (1949) uses the metaphor of mirrors in a barber shop as an analogy of

**Table 1**  
**Components of the Self-Concept at Different Levels of Perception**

Perception	Example
First-level perception	
What one thinks of oneself (self-perception)	I am an important person to my family
Perception of what one reveals to others (social self)	I present myself well in front of others
Perception of what one does not reveal to others (private self)	There are parts of me I don't want others to know
Second-level perception	
Reflection on one's own self-perception (self-reflection)	I don't like the way I look at myself
Reflection on one's other-perception	Perhaps I have been too harsh in judging others
Perception of how others perceive oneself or one's social image	Other people see me as a nice guy
Third-level perception	
Metaperception of one's self-perception	People are aware of what I think of myself
Reflection on the perception of one's social image by others	I feel good that other people see me as a nice guy

the self taking a look at itself, and being looked at by itself, ad infinitum. Mirrors are, in this regard, a popular symbol in the East and the West alike. However, adding the presence of others in the mirrors would capture more fully the richness of the self-concept.

An inviting topic of research in developmental psychology is when and how metacognition in general, and higher level components of the self-concept in particular, emerge in childhood. Another topic concerns the assessment of empathy, for which metacognition is essential. Without metacognitive capability, a person would be unable to tell if others feel that he or she understands them from their perspective. Asking such a person to assess his or her own empathy may be as hopeless as asking if a liar is telling the truth. That is why it is absurd to use self-report measures of empathy. To obtain a meaningful assessment, it is necessary

to gather information on how the target person's empathy is collectively perceived by others.

We also wish to introduce the construct of *directionality* in the construction of self-in-relations. The purpose is to assess the degree of directional balance-imbalance between perceptions or metaperceptions of how one regards others and how one is regarded by others. Directionality is a special case of the general concept of symmetry in science. It has not received due attention from researchers, but it is necessary for a refined analysis. Consider the following questions.

1. How close do I feel is the relationship between my partner and me?
2. How close do I feel toward my partner? (First-level perception in the self-to other direction)
3. How close do I feel my partner is to me? (First-level perception in the other-to-self direction)
4. How close does my partner feel I am to him? (Second-level perception in the self-to-other direction)
5. How close does my partner feel he is to me? (Second-level perception in the other-to-self direction)

Clearly, these questions have different meanings and possibly different answers. Together, answers to the last four questions give a more complete picture than the answer to the first. Comparing answers to the second and the third questions gives an indication of balance or imbalance at the first level of perception. For example, "Neither of us is close to the other" is indicative of balance; "I am close to him, but he is not close to me" indicates imbalance. At the metaperception level, "We both know that each of us feels close to the other" is an example of balance. It should be noted that balance may exist at the first and not at the second level, and vice versa. Directionality is also relevant in assessments of assumed reciprocity, defined as the congruence or incongruence between a person's perception and his or her metaperception of the partner's perception. An example of incongruence (in the self-to-other direction) is "I am close to him, but he doesn't think I am." "He is close to me, and he also thinks I am close to him" is an example of bidirectional congruence. Again, note that congruence and incongruence may coexist.

Tensions arising from incongruent perceptions and how they are managed have long been regarded as important for personality functioning. The

notion of self-consistency has dominated self theory for decades. Rogers (1951) states: "Any experience which is inconsistent with the organization or structure of self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself" (p. 515); a major goal of therapy is to facilitate revising the self-structure to assimilate experiences inconsistent with it. Such a conception exemplifies the bias toward individualism, wherein the participation of others in the self-structure is all but invisible. Rogers insists on the subjective frame of reference (understanding through the client's perceptions) and downplays the objective frame of reference (understanding through an analysis of external reality). This is yet another instance of subject-object dichotomy. In actuality, both the subjective and the objective frames of reference entail metacognition; both are indispensable for a full understanding of the client-in-relations. Rehabilitating the objective frame of reference invites the client to respect social reality, particularly significant others, toward a reconstruction of selfhood; encouraging the client to experience what others experience facilitates this reconstruction. Respecting social reality means that, without it, self-esteem is shaky at best. It also exposes the myth of "unconditional acceptance," of whose existence the burden of proof rests on Rogerians. In our view, unconditional acceptance exists only in parents toward their infants. Perpetuating the myth fosters role playing by therapists that serves an antitherapeutic function. Further, we do not regard self-consistency as an ideal to be attained. Total self-consistency is symptomatic of sterility, as when there is complete harmony between the actual and the ideal selves. It may even be a moral hazard—failure to assume personal responsibility for changing one's actions. An extreme, but not uncommon, case is the psychopath who experiences no inconsistency between his or her actual and ideal selves. We have reasons, therefore, to value inconsistency as an integral part of life—a source for creativity, change, and personal growth.

Metacognition plays a crucial role in assimilating incongruent perceptions toward cognitive reintegration. Charting levels of perception provides a measure of cognitive changes in this process. We would expect, for instance, an increase in second-level components of the self-concept: more reflections on one's own perceptions and more perceptions from another's perspective (see Table 1). In therapy, an increase in higher-level perceptions signifies cognitive reintegration at work, and hence therapeutic movement. Cognitive reintegration cannot be reduced to a frontal

attack on the client's irrational beliefs in rational-emotive therapy, as practiced by Albert Ellis (Yankura & Dryden, 1990). By what standard are judgments of rationality made? Standards vary within and across cultures through time. Thus, what appears irrational to the therapist (or others) may be quite "rational" from the client's perspective. One might even question rationality itself as the ultimate value. Even if the question of standards were set aside, another would arise, concerning the cognitive demands put on the therapist. From a dialectical vantage, therapist and client have separate cognitive systems; understanding one from the standpoint of the other requires metacognitive capability. Moreover, logicians distinguish rationality of beliefs from logicity of reasoning: Proceeding from irrational premises, one may logically draw irrational conclusions. This consideration suggests a more efficacious strategy: Attack the premises, rather than the conclusions, if attack one must. Still, merely replacing irrational beliefs with rational ideas leaves untouched the cognitive system that generates the irrational beliefs in the first place. To use a metaphor, it is cognitive surgery and implant. We prefer to achieve cognitive reintegration through inviting clients to self-examination of their thinking, whence they may better judge the rationality of their beliefs. This orients the therapist to work with and through the client's cognitive system, rather than attacking directly the irrational beliefs it generates.

### **CONCLUSION**

We began with conceptions of human existence indigenous to Asia. Psychological decentering is a key underlying Asian intellectual tradition. In particular, relationship dominance is peculiar to Confucianism. We end with the claim that all human existence is social, and hence relational, in nature and that psychological decentering, being selfless, is an effective antidote to cognitive biases and prejudices. Asian conceptions, therefore, have relevance beyond Asia.

In the course of developing indigenous approaches to the study of personality, we have been compelled to reexamine the nature of psychological knowledge and how it is generated. New approaches to knowledge generation signify a paradigmatic shift from methodological individualism to methodological relationalism. Grounded in dialectics and field theory, methodological relationalism rejects the investigation of individuals without a prior analysis of relational contexts within which

they function. To consider personality and situational factors is not enough. Missing in most of the current theorizing is a vital analytic step: consideration of the sampling of relationships, and of situations nested within a given relationship, when we make our observations. The methodological implication is revolutionary: Relationships precede situations.

We have attempted to develop a metatheoretical framework for constructions of selfhood informed by Asian intellectual traditions, relying on the notion that there are identifiable levels of metacognition. Confronting the subject-object dichotomy opens the door to investigations of transcendent consciousness; confronting the self-other demarcation underlying Western theories leads to the construction of self-in-relations. We plead that indigenous as well as mainstream personality theorists bring this construction to fruition.

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