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**Interpersonal Relationships and Relationship Dominance:  
An Analysis Based on Methodological Relationalism**

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The Pinyin romanization for Chinese words is used, with the Wade-Giles romanization given in parentheses.

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Abstract

The author argues that a mature Asian social psychology is marked by the characteristic ways in which it generates knowledge about social behavior in general, rather than by the body of knowledge it obtains about Asians. Methodological relationalism, grounded in dialectics, is explicated as a conceptual framework for the analysis of human thought and action; it is informed by Asian views reflecting the omnipresence of self-other relations in all social life. A classification of interpersonal relationships, categorized according to the basis of their formation, is provided. Cultural contrasts are explored, with reference to: (a) the formation of relationships, (b) cultural roots of how interpersonal relationships are defined in myths and legends, and (c) the dominance of specific relationships in different cultures. Finally, Confucian heritage cultures are described in terms of the construct relationship dominance.

## Interpersonal Relationships and Relationship Dominance: An Analysis Based on Methodological Relationalism

Readers of this journal have reasons to expect an articulation of what Asian social psychology entails. In what sense is it Asian? What makes it distinctive? What is its relevance and, more importantly, contribution to mainstream social psychology? Previously, Ho (1993) delineated various meanings of the term Asian social psychology: (a) social psychology of Asian peoples, a body of psychological knowledge about patterns of social behavior among Asian peoples; (b) the history and current status of social psychology in various Asian countries; (c) a new theoretical system or school of thought created by a group of Asian psychologists, or psychologists in Asia, identified by their common adherence to a philosophical base (e.g., dialectical materialism); (d) Asian psychological thought (e.g., Buddhism) about human nature and the human condition; and (e) social psychology with an Asian identity, a theoretical system or school of thought rooted in or derived from Asian cultures.

These meanings are not mutually exclusive. A mature Asian social psychology would encompass all five components. It would require different levels of analysis, to be applied to: (a) the phenomenon under investigation, (b) the conceptualization of the phenomenon, (c) the methodology employed to study the phenomenon or its conceptualization, (d) the cultural presuppositions on which the conceptualization and the methodology employed are based, and (e) interrelations among the preceding components. Concerning these levels of analysis, several points should be made explicit. First, there is no inherent reason for the phenomenon to be investigated to be necessarily Asian, any more than it is necessary for the investigator to be Asian. The investigator is at liberty to investigate whatever phenomena he or she considers interesting or significant, including, say, North American social behavior.

Second, the conceptualization of the phenomenon is viewed as a psychological phenomenon in itself and is, therefore, subject to investigation. This phenomenon is of a special kind: the generation of knowledge about human beings by human beings. It marks psychology apart from other disciplines (e.g., physics): The investigator and the object of investigation (unlike, e.g., atoms) are of the same kind. Furthermore, the generation of self-knowledge is possible, as when the investigator investigates himself or herself.

Third, culture enters into the generation of knowledge, because the conceptualization of the phenomenon, as well as the methodology employed to study the phenomenon or its conceptualization, are both informed by cultural values and presuppositions. Psychological knowledge is, in itself, a product of culture. This consideration invites us to reexamine the traditional subject-object dichotomy in psychology (cf. Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996).

In short, a mature Asian social psychology is characterized, not by the body of knowledge it obtains about Asians, but by the ways in which it generates knowledge about social behavior in general. The critical challenge facing Asian social psychology, then, is to demonstrate how it is indeed informed by, rooted in, or derived from Asian cultures in its conceptualization of, and in the methodology it employs to study, social behavior. A more demanding task is to demonstrate how it may enrich mainstream social psychology.

In this article, I endeavor to provide some answers to the questions posed at the beginning. Its scope of inquiry would have to be delimited, given the great diversity of Asian cultures. I choose to focus on the Confucian heritage that is shared by societies in the Far East, specifically Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. It is the world's oldest extant, unbroken cultural heritage, one which has been studied extensively by scholars. However, it should be borne in mind that there are other Asian traditions, such as Daoism (Taoism), Buddhism, and Hinduism, pregnant with psychological thought waiting to be tapped for the enrichment of psychology (see Ho, 1995, for an exploration of selfhood and identity in these traditions).

In what follows, I attempt to explicate methodological relationalism as a general framework for the analysis of human thought and action, informed by Asian views reflecting the omnipresence of self-other relations in all social life. I then apply methodological relationalism to analyze interpersonal relationships. First, a classification of interpersonal relationships,

categorized according to the basis of their formation, is provided. Next, cultural contrasts are explored, with reference to: (a) the formation of relationships, (b) cultural roots of how interpersonal relationships are defined in myths and legends, and (c) the dominance of specific relationships in different cultures. Finally, Confucian heritage cultures are described in terms of the construct relationship dominance.

### Methodological Relationalism

Confucianism is, above all, an ethic governing human relationships. Essentially, proper conduct means how to act in relation to others. Interpersonal relationships are of crucial importance not only historically, in the formation of human character, but also contemporaneously, in defining what it means to be human throughout the individual's lifetime. The life of the individual is incomplete. Thus the Confucian view of human existence accentuates the fundamental relatedness between individuals. This fundamental relatedness has been variously described in an assortment of theoretical constructions: in psychology, Ho's (1991, 1993, 1995) relational orientation, relationship dominance, and relational self, and Yang's (1993) social orientation; in sociology, Lebra's (1976) social relativism; in anthropology, Hsu's (1971) psychosocial homeostasis and ren (jen; literally, "person"); and, in political science, Wilson's (1974) relationship orientation.

#### Explication of Methodological Relationalism

In Ho's theoretical construction, relational orientation and relationship dominance are meant to capture the essence of social behavioral patterns in Confucian heritage cultures. As such, they are used for culture-specific theorizing. In contrast, methodological relationalism is meant to have universalistic aspirations. It refers to a general framework for the analysis of human thought and action.

Methodological relationalism, grounded in dialectics, provides a general framework for the analysis of human thought and action. It employs both thing concepts and relational concepts (distinguished by Cassirer, 1923). A phenomenon may be described in terms of both types of concepts. In physics, the dual nature of light, corpuscular and wave like, is an example.

Although it originates from Asian conceptions of human existence, methodological relationalism has universal applicability. The reason is that social behavior invariably takes place in relational contexts, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural variations. The most important relational contexts are significant interpersonal (e.g., parent-child) relationships. Culturally defined, these relationships have attributes of their own that are irreducible to those of situations or individuals. These attributes are lasting and invariant across situations. For instance, filial piety underlies the Confucian definition of intergenerational relationships; supposedly it should be observed regardless of where or when the parent-child interaction takes place. Accordingly, a relational analysis requires the theorist to consider how relationships are culturally defined, before attempting to interpret the behavior of individuals. It entails making explicit the normative expectations and behavioral rules implicit in social relations.

The strategic units of analysis are not the individual or the situation alone, but person-in-relations (focusing on a person in different relational contexts) and persons-in-relation (focusing on persons interacting within a relational context). Relationship connotes greater specificity than relation. It refers to a particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other (e.g., husband-wife), with attributes that are more specific, sharply defined, or lasting. The units may be regarded as the basic building blocks for theory construction. Among the most important intellectual tools to be employed are relational constructs, such as reciprocity, face, and dyadic interaction. The use of these constructs has pivotal significance in theory building. It promises to free social psychology from its present intellectual encapsulation: overreliance on constructs rooted in individualism (e.g., actor, ego, and self). Relational constructs reflect more accurately the nature of social behavior.

Methodological relationalism acknowledges that the social "presence" of others is always 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.

Methodological relationalism is grounded in field theory. It recognizes the individual's embeddedness in the social network. A methodological implication is that the psychology of social actions, even when pertaining to a single individual, must extend its domain to include: (a) actions by the individual, either self-initiated or in response to those of others; (b) actions by other people closely associated with the individual; (c) actions directed at the individual by people with whom the individual is interacting; (d) actions directed at the individual by people closely associated with those with whom the individual is interacting; and, finally, (e) actions directed at people closely associated with the individual by those with whom the individual is interacting directly or indirectly. Clearly the domain of social actions to be included for analysis is more encompassing and more complicated than what has been traditionally envisioned. The social arena is alive with many actors interacting directly or indirectly with one another in a multiplicity of relationships. It is a dynamic field of forces and counterforces in which the significance and efficacy of individual actions appear to have diminished.

#### Debate Over Methodological Individualism

Methodological relationalism enters into the debate about the place of the individual in the understanding and explanation of social phenomena, one that has absorbed the intellectual energy of countless thinkers, past and present. In the social sciences, the debate centers around the controversy over what has come to be known as methodological individualism (Ho, 1991; Lukes, 1973, pp. 600-601). Proponents of methodological individualism insist that no explanation of social phenomena can be complete without a knowledge of facts about individuals. A more extreme position, that of Popper (1950), insists further that all attempts to explain social phenomena must be couched in terms of such facts. Accordingly, the basic unit of analysis is the individual. In psychology, Allport may be mentioned as a champion in defending the individual in explanations of social phenomena. As stated in his classic definition, "Social psychology attempts to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals are influenced by actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Allport, 1968, p. 3).

Opponents of methodological individualism (e.g., Durkheim, 1895/1938), on the other hand, argue that facts about individuals alone are inadequate to account for social phenomena. The facts and principles of social phenomena are not reducible to a knowledge about individuals. They are emergent from the formation of relationships, groups, and institutions among individuals, independent of individual characteristics. Furthermore, facts about individuals are in themselves to be understood only in reference to social contexts.

Among psychologists, personality theorists have been the most faithful practitioners of methodological individualism. Since the 1960s, however, scathing criticisms of personality theories have been voiced (Krasner & Ullmann, 1973; Mischel, 1968). The concept of personality itself, which has enjoyed almost unquestioned scientific respectability for decades, comes under attack. In social psychology too, disquiet over the bias toward methodological individualism has been voiced. Fiske (1992) points out that the individual and the situation have long been the principal units of analysis; consequently, "social psychologists have developed a myriad of independent, unconnected trait and situation theories for each distinct kind of social phenomenon" (p. 689).

The disquiet over the individualistic bias grows louder when psychologists (e.g., Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra; Ho, 1991, 1993; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994) take a look at social phenomena in non-Western settings. Views about the autonomous individual may be questioned from both historical and global perspectives. The individualistic mode of social life is not, in actual fact, representative of the human experience. Rather, the collectivistic mode has been more representative by far throughout the ages and in diverse parts of the world. In Confucian societies, for instance, the family, and not the individual, has been regarded as the basic social unit since ancient times. Social life is marked by a fundamental relatedness between

individuals, not autonomy. One would, therefore, question the applicability of a methodology predicated on individualism in Confucian societies--or in any society, as I would argue.

### Dialectics

Methodological relationalism offers a solution to the debate by adopting a dialectical stance. To go into depth the foundations of a psychology grounded in dialectics is beyond the scope of the present analysis (see Riegel, 1979, for an exposition). It would suffice to state some of the propositions fundamental to dialectical psychology that are especially relevant to the present discourse. To begin with, dialectical psychology recognizes that the principle of hierarchical organization, common to systems theories, underlies social behavior. Each of the constituent parts subsumed in a societal system (individuals, interpersonal relationships, groups, and intergroup relationships) may be regarded as a system or subsystem in itself, with its own organizational properties. Also, the patterning or arrangement among the parts, rather than the properties of the constituent parts, define the organizational properties of the system. Accordingly, manifold levels of complexity are involved: individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and societal. A full account of the social system entails, therefore, an analysis of its constituent parts, interrelations among them, and part-whole relations. Thus a complete knowledge about a system contains everything known about its subsystems. However, the converse of this proposition does not hold. (To say that it does would invite accusations of reductionism, attempting to explain a system on the basis of a knowledge of its subsystems.)

If carried to its logical ultimate, dialectics confronts us with the proposition: Everything is a part or subsystem of its totality, that is, the entire universe. This totality, in Hegel's philosophy, is the absolute idea or "Idea." Dialectics, in the form of discursive, progressive thesis-antithesis-synthesis, is the philosophical road to reach the Idea. But, I submit, to know the Idea is beyond the reach of mortals. We have to be content with approximations to knowledge about the totality, and work on the presupposition (faith?) that to gain a partial knowledge of subsystems is possible. The question is: Which subsystem within the totality should we focus on or begin working with? In the social sciences, this question has generated endless debates between psychologists and sociologists. Is the subsystem the individual, relationships, or society?

Dialectical psychology takes a fundamental stand in rejecting any contention that a thing or system may be adequately understood without reference to the whole of which it is a part. In particular, it rejects the investigation of individual behavior without reference to interpersonal, individual-group, and individual-society relations. The analysis of human thought and action necessitates a recognition of at least three components: (a) processes internal to the individual ("inner dialectics," e.g., cognitive processes), (b) processes external to the individual ("outer dialectics," e.g., interactions between individuals), and (c) interactions between internal and external processes. Dialectical psychology demands attention to the interdependence, as well as tensions and contradictions, among all three components. For instance, cognitive processes reflect interpersonal interactions, and vice versa. Stated in another way: The individual represents a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm (society) of which it is a part. In particular, intrapsychic conflicts reflect contradictions found in external reality; and the conditions of each individual reflect societal health and pathologies.

The fundamental stand of dialectical psychology, therefore, implies that embodied in the knowledge about a subsystem is a knowledge about the whole system. However, the knowledge gained about the whole system is incomplete. We cannot say that a full knowledge of a subsystem contains everything known about the whole system. No matter how exhaustive, a knowledge about individuals alone cannot tell us everything about the society to which they belong.

From a dialectical perspective, we may see how misleading it is to speak of "social facts" and "facts about the individual," in Durkheim's sociology, as if they were mutually exclusive categories. (Similarly, dialectics rejects the pseudodichotomy between nomothetic and ideographic sciences.) A social fact, though not reducible to facts about the individual, is nonetheless a fact about the social behavior of and manifest by individuals; and a fact about the individual is a social fact wherever it refers to behavior occurring in the presence of others,

actual, imagined, or implied. A knowledge of one enhances, and a lack of knowledge of one diminishes, the understanding of the other. Hence, a relational analysis of both and their interaction is called for. Methodological relationalism is thus grounded in dialectics. It confronts the bias toward methodological individualism in mainstream social psychology.

In what follows, I attempt to apply methodological relationalism to analyze interpersonal relationships.

### A Classification of Interpersonal Relationships

The classification of interpersonal relationships is a first, and indispensable, step in applying methodological relationalism to theory building. Interpersonal relationships may be characterized by their attributes, such as accepted-unaccepted (e.g., nonconsanguine sexual vs. incestuous relationships), primary-secondary (e.g., family vs. nonfamily), inclusive-exclusive (e.g., friends vs. marital partners), affective-instrumental, vertical-horizontal (e.g., according to generational rank), equal-unequal, ascribed (e.g., by birth)-acquired (e.g., by achievement), voluntary-involuntary (e.g., marriage based on self-declared love vs. arranged marriage), and permanent-impermanent (or unbreakable-breakable).

Some attributes are intrinsic to specific relationships. For example, the parent-child relationship is, by definition, consanguine (if biological), primary, vertical, ascribed, and involuntary. These irreducible, defining attributes are intrinsic to the parent-child relationship. Cultural definitions are more inclusive, in that relationships are characterized by nonintrinsic attributes as well. Thus, in most cultures, the parent-child relationship tends to be affective, unequal, and permanent.

The following is a classification of relationships, categorized according to the basis of their formation.

1. Kinship by blood (consanguinity), marriage, adoption, or godparenthood
  1. nuclear family
  2. extended family
  3. blended or reconstituted family
2. Connection by birth
  1. geographical origin (e.g., being born in the same village)
  2. membership in the same clan
  3. membership in the same tribe
  4. membership in the same ethnic group
  5. membership in the same cultural group
  6. membership in the same caste or pariah group
3. Nationality
4. Political authority, e.g.,
  - ruler-minister
  - ruler-subject
  - lord-vassal
5. Subjugation by military conquest, slavery, or colonialism, e.g.,
  - victor-vanquished
  - master-slave
  - colonial master-colonial subject
6. Social class
7. Office or employment, e.g.,
  - employer-employee
  - supervisor-supervisee
  - coworkers
8. Residential location, e.g.,
  - neighbors
9. Institutional affiliation, e.g.,

- educational institutions (e.g., alumni)
- religious institutions
- 10. Social connections based on ascription (e.g., inheritance) or achievement
  1. formal membership in clubs, associations, or other social organizations
  2. informal membership in social groups
- 11. Tutelage, apprenticeship, or guardianship, e.g.,
  - teacher-disciple
  - master-apprentice
  - classmates
  - guardian-ward
- 12. Professional consultation, e.g.,
  - doctor-patient
  - counselor-client
- 13. Companionship, affection, or sexual attraction, e.g.,
  - friendship
  - heterosexual relationship
  - homosexual relationship
- 14. Situational, temporary, or chance encounters, e.g.,
  - experimenter-experimental subject
  - casual acquaintanceship (e.g., fellow travelers)
  - internet pals

Of course, a relationship may be formed on multiple bases and, therefore, may be classified into more than one category. For example, a couple may be simultaneously coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Moreover, the nature of a relationship may change through time, for example, from casual acquaintanceship to friendship. Some relationships are defined by the relationship of relationships within the domain; as such, they are higher-order relationships. The relationship between the spouse (1) and a lover (13) of the same person is such an example. Added to this complexity is yet another category that is already causing ethical and legal nightmares: relationships formed on the basis of donor sperms or eggs, surrogate biological mothers, or other techniques of the Brave New World.

The domain defined, though vast, is by no means exhaustive. Still, it serves to illustrate how varied are the relationships humans beings form with one another. No social science discipline can deal with the domain in its entirety. Some categories of the domain tend to fall within the specialization of an academic discipline. Traditionally, kinship (1) and relationships based on connections by birth (2) tend to fall within anthropology; relationships based on nationality (3), political authority (4), and subjugation (5) tend to fall within political science; relationships based on social class (6), office or employment (7), residential location (8), institutional affiliation (9), and social connections (10) tend to fall within sociology; and relationships based on tutelage (11), professional consultation (12), affect or sexual attraction (13), and situational encounters (14) tend to fall within psychology. But this is only a convenient division of labor. Given a dialectical perspective, knowledge in one academic discipline is viewed as interdependent with knowledge in other disciplines. Accordingly, boundaries between academic disciplines would become more permeable, perhaps even disappear.

There is great unevenness in the attention given by psychologists (Asian psychologists included) across categories of relationships. Compare, for instance, the preoccupation with the counselor-client relationship (12) with the near inattention given to relationships formed on the basis of caste membership (2.6) or subjugation by military conquests or colonialism (5). Until the advent of Afro-American studies, slavery did not receive due attention. Overall, research attention seems insensitive to the magnitude of humanity involved and the historical experience common to many peoples. They substantiate the charge that, as a whole, psychologists tend to be socially indifferent--and Eurocentric in their worldviews.

## Cultural Contrasts

### Formation of Interpersonal Relationships

Asian cultures are rich in conceptions of why and how various interpersonal relationships are formed, developed, and dissolved. In India, the conception is fully informed by Hindu beliefs in karma and reincarnation (or the transmigration of souls). In China, the concept of yuan may be traced to the secularized Buddhist doctrine of karma. The word yuan has various meanings, among which are affinity, predestined relationship, and the cause of a predestined relationship. Rooted in the beliefs of predestination and fatalism, yuan provides a cultural explanation for the formation of interpersonal relationships on the basis of predestined affinity or enmity (Yang & Ho, 1988). Yuan predetermines whether a relationship will be characterized by attraction or repulsion. Close relationships are supposed to result from yuan, as do casual acquaintanceships. Of particular interest is that some relationships result from the transmigration of one's life, supposedly to repay a debt of gratitude or to seek vengeance. Such beliefs have a deep influence on the conception of not only life, but also relationships: Continuity is possible, from past lives, through the present, to future lives yet unborn. If the interpersonal affinity survives even death, a relationship may endure beyond this life. No wonder why lovers find the idea of yuan so appealing. Thus, Yang and Ho (1988) reported that lyrical expressions containing the word yuan are commonly found in popular songs in Hong Kong. More generally, they found evidence that yuan is still very much alive in contemporary Chinese culture.

Cultural definition plays a role in governing not only the formation but also the termination of relationships. Of particular interest are those where entrance into a relationship is voluntary, but exit from the relationship, once formed, is not. The Catholic definition of marriage is an obvious example: exclusive of any third party, unbreakable, and therefore permanent. Similar defining characteristics apply to membership in a wide variety of organizations, such as religious orders, cults, and secret societies; typically, entrance is marked by elaborate ceremonies or initiation rituals. They also apply to some relationships based on tutelage in traditional China. For example, an apprentice who enters formally into a relationship with a martial arts master is not supposed to exit from it, or to acknowledge another master (especially one from a different school) without the master's approval. The apprentice addresses his or her master as shifu ("teacher-father"). A formal master-apprentice relationship may become a quasi father-son relationship; and the apprentice enters into a kinship, modeled after the extended family, with the master and his significant others.

The Japanese iemoto ("family root" or "family origin") is a secondary (nonfamily) grouping or collectivity, comprising a master (called the Iemoto) of some art or skill (e.g., judo, calligraphy, or flower arrangement) and his disciples. The decision to enter into an iemoto is voluntary; however, quitting from it is rather unusual. In its most exaggerated form, an iemoto is a huge pyramidal organization with a million or more members. Hsu (1975) depicts the iemoto as "the heart of Japan," because it represents not merely an organization but a way of life; its pattern of interpersonal relationships extends into many realms of Japanese society beyond the iemoto. In this connection, it may be observed that many Japanese graduates face fateful decisions: They may choose the company by which they are employed; however, having made the choice, they are expected to be committed to a lasting relationship with the company, and hence to lasting relationships with other employees of the company.

In the process of societal modernization, changes in the conception of how relationships are formed would be expected, especially among the better educated. Yang and Ho (1988) found that, among university students in Taiwan, individual modernity is negatively related with the tendency to attribute the formation or dissolution of relationships to yuan. Moreover, contemporary conceptions of yuan differ to a large extent from past conceptions rooted in predestination and fatalism. Thus personal choice now plays a more important role in the formation of relationships. Changes in the distribution of sharing, control, and reciprocal involvement across different interpersonal relationships within a society would also be expected. Available data suggest that, among university students in Hong Kong, instrumental (coworker) and voluntary (friend) relationships are gaining ascendancy, whereas relationships based on

blood or marriage ties (parent and kin) or on residential location (neighbor) are waning--the traditional pattern is being reversed (Ho & Chiu, 1994, Study 2). Such a redistribution of self-other involvement across relationships supports the contention that the emergence of voluntarism accompanies societal modernization.

Conceptions about the formation of relationships informed by beliefs in reincarnation are virtually absent in the West (Ho, 1995). The idea of transmigration of souls from one body to another was central to the Pythagoras' school and Orphic mysteries, but it has hardly survived in contemporary Western cultures. As expected, psychological research has been devoted almost exclusively to the formation of voluntary relationships. Research on interpersonal attraction figures prominently in particular. Unconditional continuity or permanence, it may be noted, is not an essential characteristic of voluntary relationships based on interpersonal attraction.

### Myths and Legends

Legendary tales provide a rich source for exploring the cultural roots of how interpersonal relationships are defined. In the Oedipal myth, it is the son who kills the father. But in the Chinese counterpart, the story of Xue Rengui (Hsueh Jen-kuei), it is the father who kills his son. This popular legend is a superb example of a historical figure mythologized--a collective product of folk imagination--and has been incorporated into the standard repertory of Beijing opera. A soldier of great martial skills during the Tang dynasty, Xue was assigned to military duty on a distant frontier and achieved great victories. In one version of the legend, on his way home for the first time after 18 years of imperial service, Xue saw a lad shooting wild geese. Impressed with the lad's skill, he challenged the lad to a contest of marksmanship, claiming that he could shoot two geese with a single arrow. The lad accepted the challenge, whereupon Xue shot him instead of the geese. Xue exclaimed: "I could have spared the boy, but a soldier like me could never let another live if he was superior in marksmanship with the weapons in which I excel" (quoted from a synopsis of the legend, entitled "At the Bend of the River Fen," in Scott, 1958, p. 63). The denouement was the tragic realization that the lad Xue had killed was none other than his own son, born shortly after he left home 18 years ago.

The Xue legend provides a counterpoint to the Oedipal myth: It is the father who kills the son, rather than the reverse. More generally, Chinese legends are replete with filicide, rather than patricide (Ho, in press). Nonetheless, we should be reminded that the Oedipal myth begins with attempted filicide: The father wants to kill his son by having him exposed in the wilderness. Moreover, the history of the house of Oedipus is a history of family violence, far more typical in the form of filicide than patricide (see Rascovsky, 1995). Freud disregarded largely the theme of filicide; this, in itself, is a topic worthy of investigation. Because of his towering influence, patricide has become the dominant theme in standard psychoanalytic interpretations of the Oedipal myth.

The legend of Xue and the Oedipal myth, both great tragedies of familial relationships, strike a common chord in the human experience. The Freudian interpretation of the Oedipal myth is focused on the sexual rivalry between father and son for the mother. But a broadened interpretation demands no less our attention: The Oedipal myth poses the universal question of how the father-son relationship and, more generally, authority relationships are to be defined. Bellah (1976) contrasts the father-son relationship between Christianity and Confucianism: "The Confucian phrasing of the father-son relationship blocks any outcome of Oedipal ambivalence except submission .... In China filial piety and loyalty became absolutes. In the West it was God alone who in the last analysis exercised power. In China the father continued to dominate" (p. 95). In Christianity, the biblical commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," was God's law conveyed to the Jewish people through Moses. Ultimately, Christian ethics is God centered, whereas in Confucianism it is anchored in interpersonal relationships.

Defining the father-son relationship entails the problem of handling intergenerational rivalry and conflicts. Both father and son are bound to resolve potential conflicts between them within the confines that their culture allows. For the father, the problem concerns the limits of paternal authority and tolerance of the son's defiance. For the son, a basic developmental task is to internalize societal control over aggressive impulses, accomplished largely through learning

how to handle conflicts with the father and other authority figures. A balance between self-assertion and submission to authority is reached upon the completion of this task.

In this regard, the Western and the Confucian traditions provide dramatically divergent views on what constitutes an optimal balance, with far reaching psychological consequences. In Western mythology, Oedipus defied fate dictated by the Delphic oracle; Prometheus defied the authority of Zeus. Both were tormented tragic heroes who paid dearly for their actions. Yet, their actions were expressions of daring and creativity, bearing testimony to the defiant human spirit. From this mythology springs the seminal ideas of individualism, that the individual is a responsible, autonomous, and self-directed being; of existentialism, that individual action is significant in giving meaning to life, regardless of its consequences; and of a worldview that posits the possibility of mastery over fate, even progress, through individual action.

But these ideas pose a dilemma: How can society function at all, if each individual is self-directed? And how can social order be preserved, given that conflicts are unavoidable when individuals all assert themselves? The Western solution to this dilemma is based on balancing the rights and responsibilities of each individual against those of other individuals, within the confine of moral and legal principles. The expression of conflicts is legitimized, not suppressed. Thus, Westerners tend to regard self-expression and the meeting of individual needs as a matter of rights to be defended against the encroachments or violations by others or by collective authority. We may say that the Western orientation is rights preoccupied. By contrast, the Chinese orientation is obligation preoccupied.

The message of the Chinese legend of Xue is also clear: To challenge paternal authority or supremacy is highly dangerous, and is forbidden (Ho, in press). Submission, rather than self-assertion, is the proper course of action and the safe strategy for survival. Socialization in Chinese society, governed by Confucian filial piety, attaches overriding importance to impulse control, beginning from the earliest years in life. Filial piety prescribes how children should behave towards their parents, living or dead, as well as towards their ancestors. It makes stringent demands, from the time one is considered old enough to be disciplined to the end of one's life: providing for the material and mental well-being of one's aged parents, performing ceremonial duties of ancestral worship, taking care to avoid harm to one's body, ensuring the continuity of the family line, and in general conducting oneself so as to bring honor and avoid disgrace to the family name. The emphasis on impulse control is adaptive for meeting the stringent requirements of social control later on in adulthood. In line with Confucian demands of maintaining harmony (see Ho & Chiu, 1994), aggression is suppressed. And harmony is best maintained in a hierarchical social order with clear authority ranking.

The question arises: To what extent are these Confucian demands operative in contemporary Chinese societies? After reviewing the evidence, Ho (1996) concludes that filial piety, a core Confucian value, is on the decline and no longer commands unquestioned observance it once did. Yet, the evidence also consistently implicates filial piety in the development of authoritarian moralism and cognitive conservatism. Filial piety continues to support patterns of socialization characterized by authoritarian moralism. It puts the accent on impulse control, not self-expression; moral correctness, not psychological sensitivity; obedience and indebtedness to parents, not self-fulfillment. In terms of cognitive socialization, the effects of filial piety are also operative: Individuals inculcated with filial precepts are biased toward cognitive conservatism or resistance to cognitive change.

#### Which Relationship is Dominant?

According to Hsu (1963), the Chinese family system is characterized by the dominance of the father-son relationship, in contrast to the dominance of the husband-wife relationship in the United States. The significance of this fundamental difference cannot be overemphasized, because it lies at the root of so many differing aspects of social life within and beyond the family between the two societies. The father-son relationship in Chinese society is marked by being vertical, unequal, involuntary, and unbreakable; in contrast, the husband-wife relationship in the United States is marked by being horizontal, equal, voluntary, and breakable.

It should be noted that dominance does not necessarily imply psychological closeness. On the contrary, there is converging evidence from diverse sources to indicate that the Chinese father-son relationship is marked by affectional distance, tension, and perhaps even antagonism (see Ho, in press). Thus, the notion of father-son dominance may have sociological validity, to the extent that it is structurally the most important relationship in a patrilineal social system. However, its psychological validity is doubtful.

In terms of generational rank, the father-son relationship is a vertical relationship, whereas the husband-wife relationship is a horizontal relationship. In terms of Fiske's (1992) theory of social relations, authority ranking would be prominent in the father-son relationship in both China and the United States. Both father and son must attend to their positions in a linear, hierarchical ordering of authority. Thus, the father-son relationship is asymmetric. The Confucian definition of the husband-wife relationship entails equality matching as well as authority ranking. In the United States, equality matching is an ideal for the husband-wife relationship; presumably the relationship is symmetric, marked by egalitarian exchanges and balanced reciprocity.

We may trace the roots of father-son dominance to the Confucian ethic of filial piety, and of husband-wife dominance to the Christian conception of marriage and the family. Of course, filial piety extends beyond authority ranking: It constitutes an encompassing ethic governing socialization and intergenerational relationships. Moreover, it must be recognized that filial piety defines the reciprocal obligations between generations and, therefore, governs children as well as parents. It is a primary paternal obligation to bring up children, through proper education, as filial sons and daughters. Failure to do so would render the father himself unfilial in the eyes of his ancestors. A theoretical implication is that the reciprocity of obligations should be given explicit recognition in the father-son relationship. More generally, the norm of reciprocity applies regardless of authority ranking; it binds both parties to an interlocking network of obligations and responsibilities. Thus father-son interaction is influenced by mutual expectations between father and son, and their understanding of each other's expectations.

The father-son relationship based on blood ties is completely involuntary. To this relationship, the Confucian definition imposes an imperative: It is absolutely binding to the son: Under no circumstances may he sever ties with his father. (Only under the most extraordinary circumstances would a father disown his son.) Taking legal action to terminate one's relationships with one's parents, as we have witnessed recently in the United States, would be unfilial in the extreme--simply inconceivable! By contrast, the husband-wife relationship based on self-declared love is voluntary; its permanence cannot be taken for granted.

### Relationship Dominance

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; moreover, they would tend to exhibit consistency across situations nested within a specific relationship. It is important to note that relationship dominance operates across interpersonal relationships. In itself, the concept says nothing about which specific relationship is dominant.

Relationship dominance is more likely to be found in sociocultural contexts where interpersonal relationships are characterized by involuntariness and permanence. Imagine a person who is born, grows up, and expects to remain in the same village; a person who joins a company and expects to work there for life; or a couple whose marriage is arranged. Some, if not all, of the significant relationships would be involuntary with respect to their formation or termination. These persons would expect a world of stable relationships, harmonious or otherwise, from which there may be no exit; and they would have to make the best of it.

Relationship dominance describes the pattern of social behavior in Confucian cultures, in contrast to the individualistic pattern in the West. Confucian definitions of interpersonal

relationships are marked by their imperative nature--that is, by their pervasiveness, stringency, and intolerance of deviation. The more imperative the cultural prescriptions are, the more they constrain individual choice and behavior. On this dimension, the Confucian ethic governing interpersonal relationships would rank very high indeed. Among interpersonal relationships, the most important are the Five Cardinal Relationships: between ruler and minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers, and between friends. Reinforced by the weight of Chinese culture for centuries, the prescriptions for proper conduct are inviolable; little or no deviation would be tolerated before sanctions are imposed. Generalized to interpersonal relationships beyond the family, the Confucian emphasis on propriety, formality, and status hierarchy demands impulse control, leaving little room for the spontaneous, unbridled expression of feelings. In this connection, I find it strange that Triandis (1989) characterized Chinese culture as "relatively' loose" (p. 511) on the tightness-looseness dimension of cultural variation.

Relationship dominance implies role dominance, given that role behaviors are culturally prescribed. That is, to a large extent the role assumed by the individual, as a minister, parent, or spouse, overrides his or her personality to determine role behavior. To illustrate, in Beijing opera the roles ascribed to the hero and the villain, as well as to men and women, are highly stylized. The good and the bad characters are sharply demarcated, signified by different face paintings. This leaves little room for the psychological characterization of the individual. The artistry of the actor emerges through a demonstration of his unique approach to characterization within stylistic constraints--a difficult task indeed. Similarly, in society at large, the individuality and self-assertion are confined by prescribed role behaviors.

From the vantage of relationship dominance, identity is not defined by the attributes of an individual but by the interknitting of interpersonal relationships in which an individual is embedded. Relationship dominance thus implies relational identity, a term that may be used to refer to personal identity defined by a person's significant interpersonal relationships (Ho, 1993, 1995). In the language of self psychology, the self rooted in relational dominance is a relational self, construed as interdependent with, not independent of, other selves. It differs from the public self, which refers to aspects of the self that a person reveals to others (as distinct from the private self that is concealed from public scrutiny). It also differs from individualistic conceptions of the self in some important respects. The boundary between self and nonself is not sharply demarcated; the self is not distinct and separate from others, encapsulated unto itself. Relational selfhood takes full recognition of the individual's embeddedness in the social network. It facilitates psychological decentering: to rein in egocentricity, and to extend the consideration for oneself to the consideration for others.

Among the categories of interpersonal relationships defined above, those formed on the basis of social connections are specially important for locating a person's place in a given social network (Ho, 1993). A knowledge about the constellation of connections within a group functions much like a social map to help actors, inside or outside the group, to navigate their way through the social terrain. Social connections may be based on ascription or achievement, and on formal membership in social organizations or informal membership in social groups. A person's social connections serve as an indicator of his or her face or social standing. However, social connections should not be confused with social status. A person who has connections with people of high status may be of humble status himself or herself, and vice versa; however, connections acquired through achievement are in themselves status indicators. Sometimes social connections take on a sinister face: People in mainland China joke about guanxixue (literally, the study of social connections)--referring to how to get what one wants through the mediation of someone in a position of influence. The efficacy of individual actions pales into insignificance against that of having the "right" social connections.

Relationship dominance is also manifest through the norm of reciprocity. Whereas the norm of reciprocity is universal, its expressions in Asian cultures assume an imperative quality in regulating social exchanges that is far more pronounced than in Western cultures (Ho, 1993). It binds persons-in-relationship to an interlocking network of obligations and indebtedness. The

obligation to repay indebtedness may have no time limitation. For instance, legendary tales abound about relationships formed on the basis of yuan for a person to repay an indebtedness owed to another in a previous life (Yang & Ho, 1988).

In sum, relationship dominance ascribes primacy to reciprocity, interdependence, and interrelatedness between individuals, not to the individuals themselves. It constrains individual choice and tends to inhibit the development of individuality. In this sense, relationship dominance is antithetical to individualism. The extreme antithesis of relationship dominance is self-contained individualism. Sampson (1977) described the self-contained individual as one "needing or wanting no one, avoiding interdependence and contact with others so as to secure one's own satisfaction" (p. 778). Relationship dominance differs from collectivism, however. The emphasis is put on relationships, rather than on collective interests. Loyalties based on personal (e.g., familial) relationships within a collective often contradict, even sabotage, the larger interests of the collective. It is important to specify the kind and quality of relationships between the individual and the collective or between individuals within the collective, in order to assess the effect of relationships on social behavior.

### Conclusion

The analysis above serves to show how individual behavior must be understood in its relational contexts, how varied interpersonal relationships may be formed or dissolved, and how the cultural definition of interpersonal relationships imposes limits on behavioral variation due to personality and situational factors. It also illustrates that a social psychology predicated on methodological individualism is fundamentally ill-equipped to analyze social behavior. Thus the bias toward methodological individualism in psychology has profound consequences. It impedes the development of a psychological science capable of accounting for the complexity of human behavior.

A relational perspective of human existence leads to an explicit recognition of how individual volition is circumscribed in the network of social relations; it tempers the view of the individual as being autonomous, seeking to gain mastery over the environment and his or her own psychic life and destiny. However, the portrayal of the autonomous individual with unbound freedom of choice represents only an idealized, predominantly Western, version of human existence. In actuality, much of the time people are subject to the constraint of social relations, to a greater extent than what individualism would lead us to appreciate.

A modest step has been taken in the explication of Asian social psychology. A legion of possibilities awaits its development and application into diverse domains of human behavior.

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