

Ho, D. Y. F., Chan, S. F., & Zhang, Z. X. (2001). Metarelational analysis: An answer to "What's Asian about Asian social psychology?" Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies, 2 (1), 7-26.

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**Metarelational Analysis:
An Answer to "What is Asian About Asian Social Psychology?"**

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Abstract

Asian social psychology begins with relational conceptions of human existence. This demands new approaches to knowledge generation, leading to a paradigmatic shift from methodological individualism to methodological relationalism. Grounded in dialectics, methodological relationalism insists on the prior analysis of relational contexts for understanding social actions. It attends to social actions within the context of not only interpersonal relationships, but also the relations of relationships. This calls for metarelational analysis, using relational constructs such as guanxi. The analytic implication for social psychology is revolutionary: Relationships precede situations. The furtherance of metarelational analysis will open new avenues for knowledge generation in social psychology.

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Word count: 6,963 (excluding abstract)

Keywords: Asian, Social Psychology, Metarelational Analysis, Methodological Relationalism, Guanxi

Metarelational Analysis: An Answer to “What is Asian About Asian Social Psychology?”

In the inaugural issue of the Asian Journal of Social Psychology, the editor (Editor’s preface, 1998) proclaims that “the formation of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (ASSP) is an example of transformative change” (p. iv). The ASSP was formed, he argues, out of the need to create a “third force” in social psychology. (The first is represented by the United States, and the second by Europe.) The editor’s proclamation is at once visionary and audacious: visionary because it seeks to establish for Asian social psychology an identity of its own as well as a solid place toward the development of a universal psychology; audacious, because it demands the practitioners of Asian social psychology to make good their claim of constituting a third force.

But what is Asian about Asian social psychology? That was the title of a roundtable conducted most recently at the Third Conference of the Asian Association of Social Psychology, Aug. 4-7, 1999, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan. No doubt, the question will continue to dog us for years to come. How this question is answered is a measure of the extent to which we have made good our claim of being a third force in social psychology.

Few would dispute that Asian psychology is a psychology of Asian peoples, a body of psychological knowledge about patterns of cognition and behavior among Asian peoples. The question of whether Asian psychology is a psychology by Asian psychologists is controversial. And the question of whether Asian psychology extends beyond the study of Asian peoples is most challenging. To sharpen our understanding of the issues involved, we may reconsider the following propositions about Asian psychology (Ho, 1993).

1. Asian psychology is psychology in Asia: the history and current status of academic and professional psychology in various Asian countries.
2. Asian psychology is a 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. For instance, psychologists in mainland China have attempted to develop psychology based on dialectical materialism.
3. Asian psychology is a body of psychological thought, historical or contemporary, originating from Asia about human nature and the human condition (e.g., Buddhism). In itself, such a body of psychological thought does not constitute a fully developed psychology.
4. Asian psychology is a psychology with an Asian identity: a theoretical system or school of thought in psychology rooted in, or derived from, Asian cultures. Culture is viewed as a source from which methods, concepts, and principles used for theory construction may be derived.

Of course, Asian psychology may be all of the above. However, Asian psychology with an Asian identity is the most relevant to the present discourse. Previously, Ho (1998) argued that 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. Implied in this argument is that 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. A critical challenge facing Asian social psychology, then, is to demonstrate how Asian social psychology 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.

This paper is an attempt to answer the question, “What is Asian about Asian social psychology?” In order to do so, we must meet the challenge of demonstrating how a social psychology informed by Asian cultures may enrich mainstream social psychology. Because

Asian cultures are diverse, we choose to focus on the Confucian heritage that is shared by Far Eastern societies, specifically Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Common to these societies is the conception of human existence as relational, rather than individualistic, in nature. In what follows, we attempt to explore how relational conceptions may lead to methodologies for generating new knowledge about human relationships and interaction.

Relational Conceptions of Human Existence

For a number of years, the first author has labored to develop a social psychology enriched by Asian cultures. Ho (1993) used the term relational orientation to capture the essence of human relationships and interaction in Confucian heritage cultures. Relational constructs, such as relationship dominance, relational identity, and relational self, were used for developing non-Western theories of selfhood and identity (Ho, 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; moreover, they would tend to exhibit consistency across situations nested within a specific relationship. 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 within 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 phenomenal world to form the self-in-relation-with-others.

The seminal ideas for these constructs come from relational conceptions of human existence rooted in Asia. In a similar vein, 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). It should be noted that these conceptions, as characterized by Markus and Kitayama, are primarily founded on Confucianism. Other intellectual traditions of Asia, especially Buddhism, Daoism (Taoism) and Hinduism, have not received the attention they deserve (see Ho, 1995, for an exposition).

Relational conceptions appear to be in vogue among contemporary Western theorists in diverse fields of knowledge. Book-length treatments based on relational conceptions (e.g., Curtis, 1991; Duck, 1993; Hinde, 1987; Oatley, 1984) have appeared. In psychology, however, typically Western theories have not transcended methodological individualism. They still rely primarily on individualistic constructs, illustrating that intellectual habits rooted in methodological individualism are deeply entrenched. For instance, Duck deals with cognitive processes individuals bring to relationships: thought patterns, attributional styles, and the ways in which individuals recall relationship events and treat or manipulate shared knowledge. Such an analysis of relationships is founded on methodological individualism: Cognitive processes are seen as having an influence on how relationships are recalled and construed, and hence on behavior.

We would argue, however, for a dialectical view of reciprocal influence: Psychological processes (the cognitive in particular) may be seen as a product of relationships, no less than as an influence. For instance, Zhang and Yang (1998) found that decisions on reward allocation upon the completion of a task among Chinese adults depended strongly on the category of relationship a person has with the coworker concerned, even when the relative contribution to task completion was kept constant across relationship categories.

Relationships may be culturally defined, with attributes that are structural, enduring, and invariant across situations within a given culture. An example is the definition of the father-son relationship according to filial precepts in Confucianism. Culturally defined attributes of relationships have prior existence to those defined psychologically. They set the stage for how individuals perceive and construe relationships. This is, yet again, an illustration of how culture enters into the generation of knowledge within the individual's mind.

Gergen (1994), a champion of social constructionism, argues for relational realities. He states his case in radical terms: "A fundamental aspect of social life is the network of reciprocating identities.... Identities, in this sense, are never individual" (p. 209). The self is construed as relationship (K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen, 1988). Is this resonance of ideas in the East and in the West symptomatic of intercultural convergence toward relational conceptions of selfhood and identity? Is there something intrinsically or universally appealing about relational conceptions?

From Methodological Individualism to Methodological Relationalism: An Emerging Paradigmatic Shift

Relational conceptions of human existence demand new methodological approaches to knowledge generation. We discern an emerging paradigmatic shift in social psychology: from methodological individualism to methodological relationalism. Revisiting the debate about the place of the individual in the understanding and explanation of social phenomena, we argue that a psychology predicated on methodological individualism is fundamentally ill-equipped to reflect the complexities involved.

Previously Ho (1998) explicated methodological relationalism, grounded in dialectics, as a general conceptual framework for the analysis of thought and action. Methodological relationalism is informed by Asian views reflecting the omnipresence of self-other relations in all social life. It has, however, universal applicability, because actions always take place in relational contexts, regardless of socioeconomic or cultural variations. Unlike the construct of relational orientation, which is used for culture-specific theorizing, methodological relationalism may be applied to construct pancultural or unified theories of human thought and action.

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 does take 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.

Dialectical Foundation of Methodological Relationalism

Methodological relationalism is grounded in dialectical psychology, which recognizes that the principle of hierarchical organization, common to systems theories, underlies social behavior (Ho, 1998). 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.)

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 actions without reference to interpersonal, individual-group, and individual-society relations.

To give a full account of social actions in accordance with dialectical psychology, we need to consider at least the following components.

1. Individual actors, belonging to various groups, formally or informally defined, within a social system.
2. Relations among individuals belonging to the same group or to different groups.
3. Relations between individuals and the group to which they belong or other groups.
4. Relations between individuals and the social system as a whole.
5. Relations among the various groups within the social system.

From a dialectical vantage, these components are all interdependent. The actions of an individual (1) must be considered in the context of interpersonal (2), individual-group (3), individual-society (4), and intergroup (5) relations. Likewise, interpersonal relations (2) must be considered in the context of other relations (2, 3, 4, and 5). In particular, each interpersonal relationship is embedded in a network of interpersonal relationships, even in the simpler case of those among members of the same group. This consideration introduces the dialectical construct of metarelation or relation of relations--and to metarelational analysis. The domain of metarelations includes the relations of interpersonal, individual-group, individual-society, and intergroup relations. To make a necessary distinction explicit, we say that relational analysis applies to relationships between individuals; metarelational analysis applies to a domain or subdomain of metarelations. In this article, we delimit metarelational analysis primarily to the subdomain of interpersonal relationships.

It may be realized that the domain of relational contexts is vast, even when it is restricted to the social. Confronted with such complexity, the investigator has to consider two questions. First, where should analysis begin? Second, what are the units of analysis?

Levels of Analysis

Should analysis begin at the level of the individual, or at the more inclusive level of the social system as a whole? From a dialectical perspective, both are meaningful and each is essential to the other. Different levels of analysis are required. Where to begin is, therefore, a matter of interest or convenient division of labor.

Two levels of analysis are typical in social psychology, corresponding to the distinction between interpersonal relationships and interpersonal interactions. The first level concerns the description and classification of interpersonal relationships (see Ho, 1998, for a classification based on their formation). At this level, the attributes of the relationship are independent of and defined without reference to the individual partners involved. Role relationships constitute an important subset of interpersonal relationships. The term role relationships is a relational construct that designates a class of relationships, each of which relates two roles

(not persons). Role relationships are culturally defined: Two roles are conjoined such that the meaning of one derives its meaning only in relation to the other (for an example, see Ho, 1999, for an analysis of the counselor-client relationship).

The second level concerns actual interactions observed; it is more encompassing, for we must now consider how a given relationship is perceived and construed by the interacting parties involved. However, the first-level analysis should precede the second level, as required by methodological relationalism.

The distinction between the two levels of analysis may be explained more clearly with the use of the dyad as an illustration. The dyad is a relationship between two people--the simplest interpersonal context within which social behavior may be viewed. To use an analogy from logic, the dyadic partners may be thought of as the "variables," and the dyadic relationship itself may be thought of as the "relational constant," of the dyad. For instance, in Confucian societies attributes of the father-son relationship are governed by the ethic of filial piety, which is culturally defined and has prior existence to the father and son concerned. These attributes constitute the constant, in the sense that they are invariant across situations. A father is expected to act like a father, and a son is expected to act as a son, regardless of when and where they interact with each other. Thus, the situational context of their interaction cannot be characterized without a prior understanding of the father-son relational constant.

Even when the constant of a dyad is clearly defined, individuals may differ greatly in how they actually perceive, construe, and interact with their dyadic partner (a second-level analysis). Because of individual differences, we may think of the dyadic partners as the variables of the dyad. For instance, a son may differ greatly from his brothers in how he construes filial piety, and thus marks his specific relationship with his father apart from those of his brothers.

Neither the variables nor the constant are reducible to the other: The variables may be defined independently of the constant, and the constant may be independently of the variables. A dyad may be described in terms of its relational constant, without reference to its variables; such a dyad may be thought of as vacuous. A vacuous dyad becomes a fresh-and-blood interpersonal relationship, once the individuals who occupy the dyadic positions (i.e., variables) are also described.

Units of Analysis

The second question asks: What are the units of analysis? The answer depends on the level on which an investigation is focused. Ho (1998) has proposed two strategic 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.

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. These acts define his social performance in different roles. We would also argue that, together, they provide a meaningful way for defining his personality.

From a relational perspective, we may 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. A methodological implication is that we must consider 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 (e.g., husband-wife, parent-child, etc.) 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.

This 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). The reason is that 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.

A different question concerns consistency, or the lack of it, across interpersonal relationships. We submit that variation across relationships constitutes an important dimension of personality that deserves greater research attention. We view any lack of consistency as a freedom inherent in human actions, not as a nuisance in personality assessment. Some aspects of social behavior are relationship specific. Other aspects are observed in most, if not all, relationships; as such, they define the core of personality.

If the 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. The reader is referred to Gonzalez and Griffin (1997) on the treatment of dyadic data.

Social psychologists have long regarded situational variables as the variables of their investigative enterprise. Missing in most of their theorizing, however, is a vital analytic step: to consider relationships, and of 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, tend to be 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.

Relational Contexts: A Metarelatational Analysis

We now proceed to apply methodological relationalism, grounded in dialectics, to analyze relational contexts within which social actions take place. To render it less unwieldy, we delimit the analysis to interpersonal contexts.

Definition

Interpersonal relationships may be defined in different ways, according to the academic discipline followed. Role relationships, such as the Five Cardinal Relationships (e.g., between father and son) in Confucianism, are culturally defined. They exemplify the relational constants described earlier. Status relationships are sociologically defined, on the basis of socioeconomic class. Social scientists commonly accept that status hierarchies, associated

with social stratification, is a universal feature of human existence. Finally, psychological definitions apply to specific relationships between particular individuals, not to abstract role or status relationships. They are based on the assumption that interpersonal relationships may be described in terms of psychological dimensions, such as trusting-nontrusting, close-distant, and possessive-nonpossessive. These dimensions are not necessarily 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, in analyzing specific interactions between particular persons, the meanings of descriptive dimensions have to be ascertained on a case-by-case basis. It is a second-level analysis, applied to actual interactions.

In some instances, a relationship is defined on the basis of other relationships. A marital relationship may be threatened by the formation of an intimate relationship between one of the spouses and his or her lover. This lover may be unacquainted with, even unknown to, the other spouse. Thus the relationship between them is one of unacquainted persons, defined entirely by a relationship of relationships (the marital vs. the intimate). This belongs to what Ho (1998) calls higher-order relationships.

This example also illustrates that an interpersonal relationship may interact with other interpersonal relationships, leading to changes in the relationship itself--possibly with profound consequences. According, the analysis of interpersonal relationships must attend to their embeddedness in the network of interpersonal relationships. The analysis of interpersonal relationships in isolation falls short of the requirements of methodological relationalism. We need, in other words, metarelational analysis. Included in a metarelational analysis are not only interpersonal relationships but also the interrelations of these interpersonal relationships in a given social network.

Guanxi as a Metarelational Construct

The Chinese term guanxi (social connections) immediately comes to mind as an exceedingly useful construct to be employed in metarelational analysis.

Guanxi and relationship. Guanxi is a quintessential relational construct. It differs from the terms relation and relationship in subtle, but important, ways. A relationship refers to a particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other. The attributes of a relationship (e.g., husband-wife) tend to be specific, sharply defined, or lasting. Thus, relationship connotes greater specificity than relation.

A guanxi may exist between two persons who have no relationship with each other; it may be an indirect connection. One may be unrelated with a person who is nonetheless related in some important way with one's relationships. His or her social "presence" has to be taken into consideration in one's social actions.

Guanxi and social status. Guanxi may be based on ascription or achievement, and on formal membership in social organizations or informal membership in social groups. A person's guanxi serves as an indicator of his or her face or social standing. However, guanxi 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; but connections acquired through achievement are in themselves status indicators. Thus, knowing a person's guanxi locates his or her place, but not necessarily social status, in a social network. This important distinction, between place (or location) and status, has largely escaped the attention of researchers.

Often, one might attempt to establish a guanxi with a target person with whom one is unacquainted to reach specific objectives. For instance, one may approach a friend or relative to approach another person who occupies a position of influence and is hence well situated to offer help. In mainland China, guanxi manipulations for personal gain or getting things done

“through the backdoor” has evolved into what is known as guanxixue (literally, the study of guanxi). An analogous social game in American society is networking--establishing the right connections for one’s professional advancement. Networking is not, however, as pervasive or sophisticated as guanxixue; neither does it carry as much danger of leading to nepotism or corruption.

Guanxi dominance. Interactions in a network of guanxi are likely to be governed largely by interlocking obligations and indebtedness. Thus, thinking in terms of guanxi leads to an extension, or even modification, of Ho’s (1998) contention that “relationship dominance describes the pattern of social behavior in Confucian cultures” (p. 12). A description in terms of guanxi dominance would be more accurate when the social calculus involves multiple connections, direct and indirect. Guanxi dominance underlies patterns of Asian social behavior that stress the importance of securing a place in the social order; interlocking obligations and indebtedness; other-directedness and conformity; maintenance of harmony and avoidance of open conflicts (see Ho, 1993).

In the extreme, guanxi dominance becomes guanxi tyranny. It negates individuality: Social connections dictate what actions are to be taken, leaving little or no room for purely individual needs, sentiments, or aspirations. The actor becomes completely other-directed, compelled by the need to avoid disapproval or ostracism, and to maintain his or her place in the guanxi network. (Our contention is that, in many Asian societies, the need to avoid disapproval or ostracism is stronger, and more central to social functioning, than the need to gain approval.)

Methodological implications. This brief introduction of guanxi shows that it is a powerful construct whose potentialities for theory construction have yet to be realized. It is distinct from social status; and its meaning is more inclusive than, and hence cannot be reduced to, the construct of relationships. Employing the construct of guanxi would, therefore, open the door to new ways of generating knowledge.

Metarelational analysis reveals how simplistic or misleading psychological constructs based on methodological individualism can be, especially when they are applied in a cultural context of guanxi dominance. Take, for example, 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 to bring about a desired outcome in a given situation. Thus defined, self-efficacy is a self-perception of personal competence. Regarding self-efficacy as a personality attribute, researchers tacitly assume that respondents to a measure of self-efficacy locate the competence within themselves.

The difficulty with such conception is that whether 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, harsh social realities exterior to and beyond control by any single individual often dictate outcomes. Under such a condition, believing in self-efficacy (or, for that matter, internal locus of control) amounts to an inaccurate, distorted perception of reality--in the extreme, to a delusion of grandeur.

Under the condition of guanxi dominance, having access to the “right” social connections may be far more efficacious than individual actions to reach one’s goals. Personal competence is irrelevant when access to such connections is based on ascription, but may be relevant when they are based on achievement. Strengthening existing connections or cultivating new connections in order to reach one’s goals demands considerable social skills; it is an achievement in its own right. In traditional China, for instance, under conditions of gender inequality some women nonetheless managed with great skill to gain prominence indirectly through their relationships with men. Thus we must rethink what is meant by “the ability to perform adequately” and “personal competence.” Performance is now gauged by social skills in strengthening and cultivating connections to reach one’s goals; and personal

competence now refers to the ability to achieve desired outcomes indirectly through others, not directly through one's own actions.

Methodological Relationalism as Field Theory

Relational analysis has been employed in anthropology and sociology under the rubric of social network analysis, which is based on the assumption that actors are interdependent and that their interdependency influences actions (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Network analysis views social actions as arising from relational processes rather than autonomous individuals. The unit of analysis is not the individual, but the relational tie between individuals. This accords with methodological relationalism. In network analysis, the "actors" may be discrete individuals, or corporate or collective units; the relation ties may be behavioral, social, political, or economic in nature. Social scientists have used network analysis in research areas such as kinship structure, social mobility, corporate power, and international trade (Scott, 1988).

Our analytic strategy differs from network analysis in some important respects. Current network analysis is focused on the structure of social networks. It uses "objective" criteria to characterize interpersonal networks, including reciprocity, intensity, durability, density, and so forth. These structural attributes are said to impact outcomes. However, our strategy attends also to the psychological dimension in social interactions. In particular, we place great emphasis on how actors perceive themselves and their partners in the context of their relationships. No less important is how they perceive their partners' perceptions, which may be termed metaperceptions. Included in our analysis is the tension arising from discrepant perceptions and metaperceptions between actors. Additionally, we apply metarelational analysis to (a) the impact of a relationship on other relationships, and (b) the reciprocal influences between relationships. We submit that the inclusion of analysis at a metarelational level would enhance the potency of network analysis.

In retrospect, the first author has already engaged in metarelational analyses, but was not fully cognizant of their theoretical import. Ho (1993) emphasized the importance of locating a person's place in a given social network: A knowledge about the constellation of connections within a group functions much like a map to help actors, inside or outside the group, to navigate their way through the social terrain. Insightful breakthrough came at the methodological level, with the realization that metarelational analysis is ideally suited to investigate social actions in relational contexts where actors have direct or indirect connections with other actors. More conscious and systematic attempts at the metarelational level may be found in the analysis of collective representations (Ho & Chiu, 1998) and that of supervision in counseling (Ho, 1999).

A methodological implication of metarelational analysis is that the domain of social actions must be expanded to include, not only actions initiated by an actor or in response to another actor, but also the actions of people directly or indirectly connected with either one or both of them. Clearly the domain to be included for analysis is more encompassing and more complicated than what has been traditionally envisioned. The social arena is alive with actors interacting directly or indirectly with one another in manifold relational contexts.

Employing metarelational analysis thus leads to the development of methodological relationalism as a field theory that gives recognition to the significance of manifold relational contexts. By field theory, we mean the dynamic conception of social actions as the resultant of forces and counterforces generated by, and acting upon, actors who are directly or indirectly connected in a social network; the connection need not entail physical proximity. This conception attends to discrepant perceptions and contradictions within groups or collectivities. As Ho and Chiu (1998) state: "A collectivity may be ... anything but homogeneous, or free of internal contradictions and tensions" (p. 359). Individual members of

the collectivity may differ in their cognitive constructions (e.g., ideas and schemas) about shared meanings and reality. A statistical method was developed for mapping variations in individual constructions throughout the collectivity.

The dynamic conception of field theory in terms of forces and counterforces is non-Confucian in flavor. It acknowledges that the expression and resolution of conflicts may serve a socially integrative function; and that insisting on maintaining harmony, without giving opportunities for conflicts to be voiced and resolved, sows the seed for disintegration. In contrast, the Confucian view of social order insists on the maintenance of harmony in interpersonal relationships. It is a static view of society, however, for it fails to recognize the value of conflicts and provides no channels for their resolution. The result is superficial or pseudoharmony. When underlying conflicts do erupt into the open, they tend to assume violent forms. Chinese history, in itself a rich source of empirical data, bears testimony to the prevalence of fractional tendencies at various strata of society and to periodic violent eruptions known as revolutions. Investigation into the extended family reveals that it too is fraught with internal strife: sons fighting over inheritance, tension between the father and his children, and quarrels between the mother-in-law and her daughters-in-law. In brief, the Confucian ideal of harmony runs afoul of social reality. Therefore, a relational conception of human existence does not necessarily negate the role or the value of conflicts.

An Illustrative Analysis: Conflicts in the Family

Consider the relation of an interpersonal relationship with other interpersonal relationships among members of the same group. The complexity of within-group interpersonal relationships increases as a function of group size. Given a group comprising N members, the number of possible relationships among its members is equal to $\frac{N \times (N - 1)}{2}$.

The case of the nuclear family deserves special attention. It consists of eight primary relationships: husband-wife, father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter, brother-brother, sister-sister, and brother-sister relationships. (There would be nine relationships if ordinal position is taken into account; the brother-sister relationship splits into the elder brother-younger sister and elder sister-younger brother relationships.) For all 8 relationships to be present, there must be at least 6 members: the father, the mother, 2 sons, and 2 daughters. This would result in at least 15 familial relationships. Needless to say, the complexity of kinship within extended or blended (reconstituted) families would be much higher. Students of the family are agreed that the functioning of any one relationship affects and is affected by that of all other relationships.

A case in point is the classic antagonism between the mother-in-law and her daughters-in-law (a between-generation antagonism) all too commonly found in Chinese societies. Clinical observations indicate that this antagonism may be traced to problems in the husband-wife relationship in the first generation. (In traditional China, in turn these problems may be traced largely to the cultural definitions of the women's roles and of marriage in terms of social obligation rather than love.) These first-generation problems set the stage for the mother's possessive orientation toward her children, especially her son(s).

The possessive orientation serves to protect and enhance the mother's position within the family. It fosters the formation a strategic mother-children alliance to counteract domination by her husband. During family quarrels, many a husband have tasted the experience of being an emotional outcast in their own homes--shunned by their wives and children. The possessive orientation also serves to ensure that the mother may rely on her sons for support in her old age. In a way, then, the sons have replaced the husband as the main source of her emotional and financial security. Thus metarelational analysis provides fresh insights into why, in Chinese societies, father-son relationships tend to be marked by

affective distance, even tension and antagonism; in contrast, mother-son relationships tend to be close and warm.

Maternal possessiveness has adverse consequences for psychological development, however. Typically, the Chinese conception of maternal love, especially toward sons, is a classic case of overprotection and overindulgence. The mother attends to minute details, in anticipating and fulfilling the son's needs. Does he have enough to eat? Are his clothes warm enough? Often, chronological age matters little: The same devotion and the same attention to details persist even after the son reaches adulthood. Psychological weaning has yet to take place. We may use the term infantilization to characterize in particular the psychological retardation of sons. Infantilization leads to prolonged dependency. But prolonged dependency serves another function: It gives the mother more assurance that her sons will not abandon her.

The mother's security is threatened when the sons form relationships with their girl friends and wives. Given such a scenario, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are natural adversaries. And a man would find himself caught between conflicting demands of loyalty and devotion from his mother and his wife.

This metarelatational account illustrates that the husband-wife relationship in the first generation affects intergenerational relationships between the mother and her sons as well as between the mother and her daughters-in-law. In turn, these intergenerational relationships affect the husband-wife relationship in the second generation.

Conclusion

We are now in a better position to provide an answer to the question of what is Asian about Asian social psychology. Fresh insights have been gained in attempting to answer this question. The direction toward the development of a mature Asian social psychology has been delineated. We began with relational conceptions of human existence rooted in Asia. We end with the claim that all human existence is social, and hence relational, in nature. Asian social psychology, therefore, extends beyond the study of Asian peoples. It is Asian by virtue of its recognition of the relational nature of human existence and, more importantly, its insistence on new approaches to generating psychological knowledge.

The new approaches to knowledge generation signals a paradigmatic shift from methodological individual to methodological relationalism. Grounded in dialectics, methodological relationalism rejects the investigation of individual actions without reference to interpersonal, individual-group, and individual-society relations. To consider personality and situational factors is not enough. Missing in most of the current theorizing in social psychology is a vital analytic step: to consider 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.

At a relational level of analysis, we place great emphasis on (a) how actors perceive themselves and their partners in the context of their relationships, (b) how actors perceive their partners' perceptions, and (c) tensions that may arise from discrepant perceptions and metaperceptions between actors. At a metarelatational level, we take into consideration the embeddedness of relationships in a social network. Metarelatational analysis includes (a) the impact of a relationship on other relationships, and (b) the reciprocal influences between relationships. As a metarelatational construct, guanxi is exceedingly useful for developing methodological relationalism as a field theory.

In this article, we explicate metarelatational analysis as a hallmark of a mature Asian social psychology. Relational analysis is not new in social psychology, but metarelatational analysis is. Central to our argument is that new ways of generating knowledge will give life to Asian social psychology and a standing in world psychology. We argue that metarelatational

analysis holds great promise for knowledge generation, and plead for its employment by the practitioners of Asian social psychology--and of mainstream social psychology as well.

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