

 [Chinese positive psychology by Paul Wong](#) by Louise S. [2014, Nov 11]

Is it appropriate for me to post the following comment on Chinese positive psychology and solicit reactions to my distinguished members?

"Following my earlier posting on Chinese positive psychology, I propose that the three characteristics of Chinese PP are: endurance, flexibility, and harmony. The underlying principle of these attributes is self-transcendence, because each of these big three entails self-sacrifice and some form of negative emotion for the sake of the greater good in the long run. It is the Hong Kong protestors, not the Hong Kong officials, that exhibit these honorable, traditional Chinese virtues.

In contrast, the three characteristics of American pp are: personal happiness, strengths and achievement, all predicated on egotistic benefits. I bet that if you pit Chinese pp against American PP, in the long run, traditional Chinese values will prevail."

www.drpaulwong.com

 [Comment by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2014, Nov 11]

Well, Paul, are you predicting that the Hong Kong protestors will prevail over the cops?

louise
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 [Comment by Paul Wong](#) by Louise S. [2014, Nov 11]

Yes, the Hong Kong protestors cannot lose.

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 [Comment by Zhang Xuexin John](#) by Louise S. [2014, Nov 11]

looks wonderful, Paul!

best,
jon
zhangxuexinjohn@gmail.com

 [Kudos to Jie Yang by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 11]

Dear All,

Maureen used an old IP list for the following posts. The IP list grows rapidly, so for new comers, I would like to re-post the comments on Jie Yang's paper:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/etho.12023/full>

"Fake Happiness": Counseling, Potentiality and Psycho-Politics in China, Jie Yang, (2013)
ETHOS, VOI 41, #3., 292-312

Enjoy,
Louise

From: Maureen O'Hara

I have just finished reading Jie Yang's wonderful paper "Fake Happiness": Counseling, Potentiality and Psycho-Politics in China, ETHOS, 41, #3., 292-312 and I just want to share my appreciation publically for this stunning discussion of the use of psychological management by governing elites and professionals. I will be chewing on this for some time.

I have been wondering why there is no outrage in the US at the relentless downward slide of the wellbeing of the working classes, why we demonize those who are poor or need social help and why Ayn Rand's pseudo-philosophy fires up the right. Jie's chapter makes me question how much privatizing pain through psychological theory and practice undermines peoples capacity to read the broader themes of their shared history and so become objects rather than subjects. And of course my own complicity in this.

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From Paul TP Wong

I would love to read this chapter.
It is a shame that Chinese Central Government and Chinese positive psychollogists continue to spread the propagana that Chinese people are very happy in a totalistarin system.

Paul

From Teresa Kuan

Dear Professor O'Hara,

If you don't mind, I would love to share this with Jie Yang herself. She is a friend -- and I don't think she's on this listserv.

I really like your phrase "privatizing pain." Really well put.

Best wishes,
Teresa Kuan

From: Maureen O'Hara

Teresa, please feel free to share my comment and let Jie Yang know how deeply I felt her discussion. It has provoked in me some soul searching about the balance between the emancipatory aspects of psychotherapy and counseling and their accommodating aspects. And who gets to say.

 [Comment by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 15]

Dear All,

Inspired by Greg Wang's call to factor in politics in our analysis, I would like to comment on Mike Griffiths' paper on Eating Bitterness:

This paper sheds some light on Zhipeng Gao's study of elders' abuse in China. Cast into the framework of eating bitterness, the elderly generation may have eaten a lot of bitterness hence become entitled, but unlike those who reap material success through eating bitterness, the elderly's entitlement gives them no purchase except for resentment from others.

The paper on Eating Bitterness can be read together with Jie Yang's paper on Fake Happiness and other discussions on positive psychology (see the Discussion page on our website: <http://www.indigenousspsych.org/>). One of the problems shared in common between positive psychology in the West and the discourses of eating bitterness and pursuit of happiness in China is that they are all donuts with the moral core missing. Put another way, my critique of positive psychology in the US as a Happiness Donut (attached) is also applicable to the China scenario.

Skipping the moral question may come with a stiff price. There is such a thing called "moral injury" caused by "the violation of deeply held personal and societal moral standards" (Farnsworth et al., 2014, p. 251). I see some of the coping mechanisms mentioned by Mike Griffiths and Jie Yang, such as forgive-and-forget, life-is-fair, and so on, as "moral-disengagement strategies" used to justify atrocities when the perpetrator is an in-group member (Coman et al., 2014, p. 1281). Another instance of moral-disengagement is the fisherman's retort when confronted about taking advantage of the Buddhists' charity: "What's fair, what's not fair?" (http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2015/01/02/373286111/along-shanghais-river-buddhist-tradition-meets-greedy-fishermen?sc=17&f=1001&utm_source=iosnewsapp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=app)

In order to address the moral question, we may compare the moral landscapes East and West. In the traditional Confucian society, family is the model of government. Between the governing authority and the governed there is an affective bond akin to parent and children. Bad government have been referred to as tigers that eat people, but the victims are still people—never inanimate objects. The notion that people are resources, akin to natural gas and timber, is not found anywhere in classical Chinese texts, so far as I can tell.

In the West, although the sinister nature of reducing humans to resources for exploitation is noted by Heidegger and other philosophers, “human resources” is a common place term. The reason why most people in the West are not disturbed by this notion is because they are counting on a counter-measure against the degradation of humans, namely the notion of human rights and its implementation by the legal system.

Here we have two contrasting moral landscapes: One based on the strong-ties of family, in which the conflict between the two parties—the governing and the governed—are constrained by the affective bond between them, resulting in relaxed vigilance against foul play. The other is based on the weak-ties of strangers, in which the exploitation can go to extremes, a possibility that requires vigilance and stringent counter-measures such as the legislation of human rights. What happens when East meets West, and when measures of the West are imported-- as evidenced by the pervasive use of the presumably “scientific” term “resources” in reference to people and populations in China-- without the accompaniment of the counter-measures?

In a truly yin and yang fashion, the conflict of interest between the two parties—the governing and the governed—may be understood in terms of the conflict between the two sexes. This framework allows us to derive some insight from worm sex. There are two species of the worm nematode. In the mild mannered *C. elegans*, the sperm of the male is not competitive, because they don't mate often. In the species of *Caenorhabditis*, the couple mate often and with multiple partners, resulting in very aggressive sperm of males who use the female's body as the battleground to compete against one another. And females have also become tough enough to make sure the aggressive sperms that are good at fertilizing eggs don't get too pushy and harm them. What happens when the researcher mixes up the couples? The aggressive sperm can kill its partner of the wrong species, which is not equipped with an equally aggressive counter measure (Science News, Sept. 6, 2014, p. 14).

In light of the worm story, we can expect some violent sex in the wake of the globalization of China and other non-western cultures. This is where IP researchers can help to shed some light on the mating consequences of cultures.

Thanks for the stimulating reads,

Louise

References:

Coman, A., Stone, C. B., Castano, E., & Hirst, W. (2014). Justifying Atrocities: The Effect of Moral-Disengagement Strategies on Socially Shared Retrieval-Induced Forgetting. *Psychological Science*, 25, 1281-1285.

Farnsworth, J. K., Drescher, K. D., Nieuwsma, J. A., Walser, R. B., Currier, J. M. (2014). The role of moral emotions in military trauma: Implications for the study and treatment of moral injury. *Review of General Psychology*, 18, 249-262.

Sundararajan, L. (2005). Happiness donut: A Confucian critique of positive psychology. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 25 (1), 35-60.

 [jcca-14-04-Griffiths-Zeuthen-Bittersweet](#)

 [Happiness Donut A Confucian Critique of Positive Psychology](#)

 [Comment by Michael Bond](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 17]

Louise,

This is a fascinating conversation! It may relate to an intuition Vivian Lun and I want to test using the WVS: we have wondered why Diener adds H to LS in determining subjective well-being [SWB], as we have noticed the varying correlation between happiness [H] and life satisfaction [LS] from nation to nation and person to person. What is it about a national culture and personal history that makes H more or less crucial in the determination of “satisfaction with your life to date” [LS]?

Is it one’s sense of fatedness? We expect that socialization of children for Other-directedness [Bond & Lun, 2014] will be one of the keys at the national level [“life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” may not be the agenda for the good life everywhere!]; at the individual level, an endorsement of fate as a determining factor in life [as opposed to a belief in autonomy] may moderate the H-LS link.

Your thoughts on this matter are always welcome...
michael

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"And take upon's the mystery of things,
as if we were God's spies."
Shakespeare, King Lear

Link to Department website: <http://www.polyu.edu.hk/mm/bond>

my latest book: "Understanding social psychology across cultures"
(2013): <http://www.sagepub.in/books/Book240293>

Latest book on social axioms: <http://www.amazon.com/Psychological-Aspects-Social-Axioms-Understanding/dp/0387098097>

the latest addition to the "Forbidden City" of Chinese
psychology: <http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Psychology/Clinical/?view=usa&ci=9780199541850>

Recent book on Chinese organizational behaviour, edited with my M&M colleague, Xu
Huang:

http://www.eelgar.co.uk/bookentry_main.lasso?id=14417&breadcrumblink=&breadcrumb=&subvalues=&site_Bus_Man=&site_dev=&site_eco=&site_env_eco=&site_inn_tech=&site_int_pol=&site_law=&site_pub_soc=

 [Comment by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 17]

Michael,

You asked some very interesting and important questions. I agree with your hypothesis, and this is my rationale: Corresponding to the collectivism and individualism divide, you have other-directed versus self-directed orientations at the national level. At the individual level, belief in fate is a coping mechanism that neutralizes "bitterness" associated with unhappiness, thus weakens the link between happiness and life satisfaction. Fate preempts attribution of blame on others, and puts the onus on the agent to accept all kinds of raw deals, thus it is an essential ingredient of eating bitterness. As a coping mechanism, fate is pro-social and contributes to social harmony. The question is how far can this traditional rhetoric of virtue and happiness stretch to meet the challenges of the modern China. What will happen when the traditional rhetoric is stretched to the breaking point? One interesting question for you would be whether you can trust the ratings in nations where fake happiness is being promoted. Since I tend to be skeptical of self reports any way, I would like to see some objective measures such as suicide rates.

Thanks for the intriguing questions,
Louise

 [Comment by Michael Bond](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 19]

Louise,

Your thinking parallels ours, but we just did the analyses today, and the prediction at the individual level is not supported at the individual level; instead, we get a reversal.

We are now reversing our analysis and examining how life satisfaction predicts happiness, because we are using a multi-level model with the national goals for the socialization of children, we can determine at the nation level whether Self-directedness and/or Civility predicts citizen happiness...

Michael

 [Comment by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2015, Jan 19]

How interesting, Michael! Could you spell out your prediction and the reversal? My prediction is simply that the link between happiness and wellbeing may be variable in strength in China because it is not very tight as it is in the West.

As for the national level, my hypothesis is based on the distinction between strong ties versus weak ties societies--it is well known that the latter, but not the former, contributes to better public service as evidenced by schools, hospitals, along with a civility orientation. Hence my prediction is that weak ties (civility orientation) will be positively associated with happiness and well being at the national level.

Looking forward to hearing more about your study,

Louise