The Current State and Characteristics of Theoretical Development of the Chinese Self

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Abstract

The self is an important research topic in personality psychology and social psychology. Since the rise of cultural psychology, constructing a Chinese cultural self theory that aligns with Chinese social, historical, and cultural characteristics has become the objective of numerous Chinese indigenous psychologists. These theories or models exploring the Chinese self can be distinguished into three major categories: individual-collective oriented self theory, differential pattern oriented self theory, and indigenous model oriented self theory. Clarifying the theoretical development contours and context of the Chinese self facilitates a multi-dimensional and holistic understanding of the rich connotations of Chinese self-concept, thereby laying a solid foundation for further research on the Chinese self.

Full Text

Preamble

Developmental Feature and Current Status of Theories of the Chinese Self (Author's Manuscript)

Developmental Feature and Current Status of Theories of the Chinese Self*

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Abstract

The self is an important research topic in personality and social psychology. Since the rise of cultural psychology, constructing a Chinese cultural self-theory that aligns with the social, historical, and cultural characteristics of Chinese society has become a goal for many indigenous Chinese psychologists. These theories or models of the Chinese self can be categorized into three major types: individual-collective oriented self-theories, differential pattern oriented self-theories, and protogenetic model oriented self-theories. Clarifying the developmental contours and trajectories of Chinese self-theories facilitates a multidimensional and comprehensive understanding of the rich connotations of Chinese self-conceptions and lays a solid foundation for further research on the Chinese self.

Keywords: self; Chinese self; differential pattern; individualism-collectivism; self-model

Introduction

In 1890, William James first introduced the concept of "self" into psychology in *The Principles of Psychology*, making it a significant topic of psychological inquiry. James distinguished the self into two dimensions: the "I" and the "me." The former refers to the continuous identification with the stream of consciousness, while the latter denotes an object that individuals can experience, comprising three components: the material self, social self, and spiritual self (James, 1890). Modern psychological discussions of the self have all been inspired and influenced by James. Overall, before the rise of cultural psychology, Western classical self-theories could be divided into two approaches: personality psychology oriented and social psychology oriented.

The personality psychology approach to self-research is represented by psychoanalysis, with Sigmund Freud's "iceberg" metaphor of the tripartite psychic structure of superego, ego, and id being the most influential (Freud, 1923). Numerous subsequent self-theoretical constructions within the psychoanalytic system extended from this framework. While personality psychology oriented self-research deeply explored the internal structure of the self, examining drives, functions, and conscious characteristics, it overemphasized internal personality factors, neglected the influence of social environment and cultural background on personality, applied a uniform template to all individuals across all cultures, and failed to appreciate the impact of interpersonal interaction on the self.

The social psychology approach to self-research emphasizes the interactive influence between individuals and society. Building on James's work, Charles Cooley's looking-glass self theory, George Mead's social process theory of self, and humanistic psychology's view of the self all treat the self as a "social being," arguing that individual self-identity must be constructed through socialization and emphasizing the interactive process between self and social environment (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Rogers, 1951). While such self-theories paid spe-

cial attention to the relationship between individual and society, these classical theories were all constructed based on reflection of the "WEIRD" (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) psychological characteristics. Consequently, when used to explain the self of individuals in non-Western cultural contexts, they often lack cultural ecological validity (Henrich et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019).

Since the rise of cultural psychology, based on the important principle proposed by cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder—"One mind, many mentalities; universalism without uniformity"—the construction of self-models based on different cultural contexts has become a hot topic in cultural psychology (杨国枢, 陆洛, 2009; Shweder et al., 1998; Hwang, 2018). Cultural psychology inherited the social psychology perspective on the self, focusing on how people view themselves through their relationships with others and their group memberships. Triandis (1989) defined the "self" as an agent that "differentially collects, processes, and evaluates environmental information and leads to different social behaviors" based on cross-cultural comparisons. He then divided the self into three levels according to individualistic and collectivistic cultural characteristics: the private self, public self, and collective self, representing personal, general public, and group perspectives on the self, respectively. Subsequently, scholars developed the tripartite model of self, further distinguishing the basic representational forms of self across cultures as: the individual self located by personal traits, the relational self located by relational roles, and the collective self located by group identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Sedikides et al. (2011) proposed the boomerang model, suggesting that these three self-forms are exhibited in every culture, with the key being how they are balanced. The individual self serves as the center of emotion and motivation, and its relatively stable and self-protective functions constitute human nature. The relational self and collective self are both built upon the individual self and only acquire personality value when incorporated into it. The individual self gives rise to the relational self and collective self through the process of "fusion of self and others," but when encountering setbacks, the relational self and collective self retract back to the individual self.

Another influential theory in cultural psychology is Markus and Kitayama's (1991) self-construal theory. They argued that people in Western individualistic cultures tend to develop an independent self, manifested as a bounded, unique, autonomous, and self-sufficient entity that emphasizes separation from others. In contrast, the meaning system of Eastern collectivistic cultures develops around the interdependent self, where the self is defined by social relationships and emphasizes connections between people. Later, Markus and Kitayama (2010) revised their view, stating that these two types of self-construal are actually two modes of human existence and self-understanding that universally exist across all cultures and can interact with each other, producing different selves depending on specific contexts.

Although both self-theories consider the basic constructs of the self within cul-

tural contexts and have received empirical support in recent years (朱滢, 伍锡洪, 2017; Talhelm et al., 2014), in the Chinese cultural context, the cultural-self interaction they reflect lacks philosophical depth. Moreover, using such universal classification perspectives to explain the structure, operation, and corresponding levels of self-cultivation attainable for Chinese people appears overly simplistic, static, and mechanistic (汪凤炎, 2019a; Wang et al., 2019).

1.2 The Chinese Self from Sociological, Cultural Anthropological, and Comparative Philosophical Perspectives

Both historically and in contemporary reality, Chinese and Western cultures exhibit significant differences. Traditional Chinese culture, centered on the three ideological systems of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, has formed a self-conception distinctly different from Western Christian civilization (夏允中, 黄光国, 2019). Therefore, constructing a self-theory that fits Chinese society, history, and cultural characteristics to explain the personality and behavioral features of Chinese people has become a goal for many Chinese scholars and sinologists.

As early as the 1930s, sociologist Fei Xiaotong proposed that modern Western society is "organizational pattern" oriented, with the individual as the basic unit, where interpersonal relationships are like a bundle of firewood—clearly organized and forming a group state. In contrast, Chinese rural society is based on patriarchal groups, where interpersonal relationships form a network centered on kinship, constituting a "differential pattern" (差序格局). That is, every Chinese person is constituted by a differential network, like throwing a stone into a lake, creating concentric circles around the stone (the individual) that mark the closeness of social relationships (费孝通, 2008). Cultural anthropologist Francis Hsu pointed out that Western "personality" and Chinese "self-cultivation" concepts mainly involve two domains: "individual's society and culture" and "expressible consciousness." The difference between Chinese and Western cultures in understanding humans lies primarily in the different operational connotations of self-other relationships. Compared with the "individual-centered" characteristics of European and American cultures and the "supernatural-centered" characteristics of Indian culture, Chinese self-conception or self-construal has situation-determined characteristics (许烺光, 1989; 李抗, 2020). Sinologists David Hall and Roger Ames, when comparing Chinese and Western self-differences, noted that the self in Western culture possesses characteristics of rational consciousness, reduction to physiology, conscious activity, and organic functions. In contrast, the self in Chinese culture is non-rational, non-physical, non-purposive, and non-volitional. It is a kind of shared consciousness about roles and relationships, ethically relationship-based, rejecting ontological substantialist views of human beings, and advocating a "self-cultivation" concept with relational, constitutive, and processual characteristics (郝大维, 安乐哲, 1999; 翟学伟, 2018).

Building on this foundation, since the 1990s, Chinese scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan such as Yang Guoshu, Yang Chung-fang, Huang Guangguo, and Lu Luo, as well as mainland Chinese scholars Yang Yiyin, Zhai Xuewei, and Wang

Fengyan, have successively proposed or developed theories and models regarding the Chinese (or Chinese people) self. Overall, these theories or models can be divided into three major categories: individual-collective oriented self-theories, differential pattern oriented self-theories, and protogenetic model oriented self-theories.

2 Individual-Collective Oriented Self-Theories

The concept of individualism/collectivism adopted in cultural psychology's definition of the self originates from Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory. Unlike culturology's focus on using this concept at the national cultural level, cultural psychology emphasizes how individuals view their relationship with others and society, expressing a cultural model of the self. Cultural psychology self-theories all emphasize culture's dominant force over individuals and are profoundly influenced by the individualism-collectivism concept. In psychological research, "independent self-interdependent self" and "individualism-collectivism" are often used interchangeably. When compiling questionnaires or scales under these concepts, items often borrow from each other, and researchers frequently use the same measurement indicators and even experimental paradigms to explore these concepts (李抗, 2020; Talhelm et al., 2014).

Addressing the unique phenomena of the Chinese self within the individualism-collectivism theoretical orientation, the most representative self-theories include Yang Guoshu's "four-part theory of Chinese self" and Lu Luo's "composite self theory."

Yang Guoshu's "four-part theory of Chinese self" draws on individualism-collectivism cultural thinking, emphasizing that individual orientation and social orientation are the two most basic and important modes of human-environment interaction. He defined the former as a combination of high autonomy and low integration tendency, while the latter is the opposite. Yang Guoshu believed that the interaction mode between Westerners and their living environment is primarily individual-oriented, while that between traditional Chinese people and their living environment is mainly social-oriented. He then distinguished the Chinese self into four categories according to daily interaction domains: "individual orientation" (subject self), "relationship orientation," "family (group) orientation," and "other orientation" (the latter three are object selves). He argued that conflicts between the subject self and various sub-object selves are the main sources of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts among Chinese people (杨国枢, 2004; 杨国枢, 陆洛, 2009). The "four-part theory of Chinese self" was the first systematic Chinese self-theory proposed by indigenous Chinese psychologists and has received some empirical support. However, as Zhai Xuewei (2018) noted, the four-part theory of Chinese self is overly complex, attempting to accommodate and include too much content, with unclear logical relationships among the underlying elements.

Inspired by the "bicultural individual" phenomenon in Hong Kong society, Hong

Ying-yi and colleagues proposed the "dynamic constructivist approach to culture," suggesting that contemporary Chinese people, through extensive exposure to both Chinese and Western cultural traditions, can switch between the two cultural frameworks according to environmental needs. They conducted a series of priming experiments with Chinese university students, finding that images representing Chinese culture (such as "dragon" or "Confucius portrait") could activate Chinese cultural knowledge networks, while images representing Western culture (such as "White House" or "Lincoln portrait") could activate Western cultural knowledge networks (Hong et al., 2000). Since cultural knowledge networks influence individual self-construal, with East Asian cultural knowledge networks generally associated with collectivism and interdependent self, and Western cultural knowledge networks with individualism and independent self (Hong, 2009), it follows that Chinese cultural symbols can activate the interdependent self, while Western cultural symbols can activate the independent self.

Based on this, Lu Luo proposed the composite self theory, arguing that contemporary Chinese people, under the influence of both traditional Chinese culture and modern Western culture, have formed a "composite self" that lies between "interdependent self" and "independent self." Collectivism and individualism can coexist within the same individual. Individuals under bicultural influence both pay attention to self-other distinction and personal independence and uniqueness, while also emphasizing self-other connections and roles, status, obligations, and responsibilities within social relationship networks. Modern Chinese people can coordinate and flexibly apply two seemingly contradictory self-systems (陆洛, 2003; 杨国枢, 陆洛, 2009).

Overall, the above self-theories continue the individualism-collectivism cultural classification orientation, are in the same line as self-construal theory, and emerged from comparison with Western "mainstream modern civilization." These self-theories initially carried a strong dualistic color of Chinese-Western opposition (黄光国, 2012). However, in their development and exploration, they gradually abandoned the mechanistic tendency to simply view Chinese people's self as a product of collectivism, attempting to embed both individual orientation-social orientation and independent self-interdependent self within modern Chinese self-construction. They are now expanding into a multicultural convergence theory of the self (李抗, 2020).

3 Differential Pattern Oriented Self-Theories

According to differential pattern theory, examining the historical development of the Chinese self and its manifestation in contemporary society reveals that the self-structure shaped by traditional Chinese culture does not simply emphasize sociality and collectivity. Rather, the organizational model of the Chinese self is the hierarchical extension of "extending from self to others" (推己及人) (费孝通, 2008; 汪凤炎, 2019a).

From a psychological perspective, the differential pattern of social form is also an internalized psychological differential pattern. Its connotation is that, under the premise of individual-centeredness, different values and meanings are assigned to other people around the individual, pulling them into concentric circles of self-identity and forming a "self-centered" self-form with differential order (李抗, 汪凤炎, 2019). In current psychological research, Fei Xiaotong's differential pattern idea has received considerable empirical support and development. Some studies indicate that contemporary Chinese people process self-related information more elaborately when the relationship is closer (袁晓劲, 郭斯萍, 2017; 朱滢, 伍锡洪, 2017).

Based on this, Yang Chung-fang further pointed out that the Chinese self is not a fixed concept but consists of the small self and different levels of the large self, representing numerous whole-part relationships. From this perspective, the most important aspect of the self is that the small self, bounded by the individual body, always occupies the central position and is surrounded by connected others, thereby constituting different levels of the large self (Yang, 2006). Yang Chung-fang believed that the essence of the self in Chinese culture is a continuously developing moral self with flexible boundaries. By integrating others into the "self," a "no distinction between self and others" whole is formed. Moreover, the Chinese self often has a dual nature: the "large self" always tries to follow the principle of restraining selfishness and returning to propriety, presenting a "proper self" according to the situation, while the "small self" inside is a completely unrefined "private self." In this sense, Chinese self-construction actually involves expanding the boundaries of the personal self to include others, a process that can be seen as an inclusive expansion rather than a conquering expansion of the self (杨中芳, 2009).

Yang Yiyin proposed that Chinese self-concept is formed through the intertwined dual processes of "relationalization" and "categorization" under the influence of social situational priming and value orientation factors. Based on survey research results, she used the "insider/outsider" distinction to express contemporary Chinese interpersonal relationships and self-structure. According to five levels of interpersonal distance and two dimensions of "ascribed" and "interactive" characteristics, the differential pattern can be described more meticulously (杨宜音, 2009). Additionally, some research found that compared with the traditional differential pattern, the structural hierarchy in contemporary Chinese differential pattern has become more distinct and sparse, showing obvious polarization between insiders and outsiders. The peripheral layer is highly instrumental, while the core is highly emotional, with social support networks contracting toward the family core. This further demonstrates the explanatory power of Yang Yiyin's "insider/outsider theory" for the contemporary Chinese self (徐晓军, 2009).

Furthermore, Zhai Xuewei's (2018) "ethical self-realistic self" theory combines Fei Xiaotong's "realistic self" of Chinese people, as manifested in the differential pattern, with Liang Shuming's "ethical self" that follows the pursuit of unity between heaven and humans, placing them within the same coordinate system.

This coordinate system takes relational connections in social hierarchy as the vertical axis and relational connections formed by various degrees of intimacy as the horizontal axis, generating the extension space for the ethical self and realistic self. The realistic self and ethical self are a set of pre-established configurations in self-other relationships. The self centered on Confucian culture focuses on the tension between the realistic self and ethical self, and based on the degree of integration of the realistic self within relational rules, one can distinguish between the gentleman and the petty person.

In summary, various self-theories derived from the differential pattern concept can effectively explain the ethical characteristics of Chinese "egoism" and align with the five mourning grades and nine-clan system in traditional Chinese society as transmitted in the *Book of Rites*, consistent with Chinese customs and habits. These belong to culturally based theoretical models. Moreover, the "egoism" assumption of the differential pattern orientation can resolve paradoxes encountered by individualism-collectivism oriented self-theories in real situations—namely, why concepts such as equality, cooperation, and popular rights are deeply rooted in individualistic Western societies, while collectivistic East Asian societies exhibit characteristics emphasizing private connections and power structures, valuing renqing (human sentiment) and mianzi (face) (李抗, 2020). However, since the differential pattern theory's focus is in the sociological domain, self-theories in this orientation tend toward sociological research directions, emphasizing the extrapolation of the Chinese self within ethical structures and social relationships. They lack further analysis and exploration of the "individual self" at the core of the differential pattern, which possesses the most "self" psychological connotation, including its internal structure, internal functions, and developmental drives.

4 Protogenetic Model Oriented Self-Theories

In addition to individual-collective oriented self-theories developed from cultural psychology and differential pattern oriented self-theories developed from sociology, in recent years, with enhanced cultural confidence, some Chinese scholars have taken a different approach. They have begun attempting to construct Chinese self-theories or models using typical symbols or illustrations with symbolic meanings from traditional Chinese culture. The most representative among these are Kwang-Kuo Hwang's "Mandala model of self" and Fengyan Wang's "Taiji model of self."

4.1 The Mandala Model of Self

The Mandala (also transliterated as "Mandala" or translated as "altar city") is generally a symmetrical pattern with a center point, primarily circular or square. It serves as a "mind universe map" in daily practice in Hinduism, primitive Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Chinese Esoteric Buddhism. Inspired by Borobudur, Hwang proposed the "Mandala model of self." In this model, the "self" refers to individuals in the "desire realm" of Borobudur's "three realms"

(desire realm, form realm, formless realm) who have undergone socialization and possess reflective capacity. Their lifeworld can be represented by the Mandala's structure of inner circle and outer square. The psychologically meaningful "self" is at the center of bidirectional arrows: the upward end of the vertical bidirectional arrow points to the sociological or cultural level "person," while the downward end points to the biological concept "individual." One end of the horizontal bidirectional arrow points to "knowledge" or "wisdom," while the other end points to "action" or "practice." This means that the self in the "form realm" is actually in a "force field," and its actual actions may be jointly influenced by these several forces (夏允中, 黄光国, 2019; Hwang, 2011, 2018).

The "Mandala model of self" is the first self-theory constructed using a protogenetic model, with the ambition of establishing a culturally universal self-model. However, when examined within the Chinese cultural context, it is not difficult to see that although the model superficially incorporates Buddhist elements, its essence remains psychodynamic thought. The division of the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm still resembles the sandwich-like vertical three-dimensional structure of id, ego, and superego in psychoanalysis. Its focus is on adults in the form realm, without discussing how individual selves achieve penetration/connection among the three realms. The distinction among "person," "self," and "individual" is based on anthropologist Harris's (1989) view of distinguishing humans into biological, sociological, and psychological levels. Its so-called "self-cultivation" remains Western self-outward transcendence rather than Chinese self-inward integration. Moreover, the model only uses the Mandala pattern's inner-circle-outer-square structure, not the inner-square-outer-circle structure, which clearly differs from the Chinese people's long-advocated "outer-roundness-inner-squareness" style of being. The essence of "Mandala" as representing the wholeness of the mind and its nature of inclusive integration is also absent from this model. Additionally, the Mandala illustration is not common in Han culture and does not align with the typical Chinese "yin-yang thinking mode" (汪凤炎, 2018; Yang, 2006).

4.2 The Taiji Model of Self

After repeatedly contemplating the influence of traditional Chinese culture on the Chinese self, Wang (2019a) comprehensively analyzed the historical trajectory of the birth, transformation, and finalization of the Chinese self from a cultural-historical evolution perspective. Inspired by the prototype of the "Taiji diagram" and based on the worldview and theory of human nature in Chinese cultural tradition, he constructed the Taiji model of self (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). The Taiji diagram model of self uses the Taiji diagram to visually represent various types of Chinese selves. If the large circle representing "Taiji" outside the Taiji diagram refers to the self, and the yin and yang within the Taiji diagram, which can be collectively referred to as the universe's myriad concepts of opposition and complementarity, are used to represent specific pairs of self-concepts, then the Taiji model of self can visually

represent various specific types of Chinese selves. Based on this, Wang and colleagues constructed the Confucian self Taiji model, Taoist self Taiji model, and Buddhist self Taiji model to represent the self-styles of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in traditional Chinese culture, respectively (汪凤炎, 2022; Wang et al., 2019; Wang & Wang, 2020, 2021).

[Figure 1: see original paper]

Taking the Confucian self Taiji model as an example (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]), the "yin" (black portion) represents the "small self" that stands for the interests of the minority (in-group), while the "yang" (white portion) represents the "large self" that stands for the interests of the majority (out-group). The "white dot within black" implies that seeds of the large self are contained within the small self, so individuals can gradually transform the small self into the large self through aspiration and persistent self-cultivation. The "black dot within white" implies that seeds of the small self lurk within the large self, so if individuals encounter immoral situations and generate evil thoughts that are not promptly eliminated, their large self is likely to regress into a small self (Wang et al., 2019). Centered on the Confucian self Taiji model and drawing on Ames's (2006) idea of self-completion, Wang et al. (2019) further proposed the "Theory of Integrated Harmony of Self." Its core tenet is that although an individual has only one self, the self contains both large self and small self, like yin and yang within Taiji. Through persistent mind-nature cultivation, the small self can become increasingly smaller (eventually shrinking to a dot that cannot be eliminated), while the large self becomes increasingly larger (the largest large self being the "all people are my brothers and all things are my companions" type of self). When they harmonize and integrate with each other, the self can be continuously elevated. When the self is elevated to a certain level, a mature self or even an integrated harmonious self can develop. Based on the Theory of Integrated Harmony of Self and improving upon Feng Youlan's (2014) "four levels of enlightenment," Wang et al. (2019) divided the levels of self-cultivation achieved according to Confucian moral standards into four hierarchies from low to high: natural person, ordinary person, gentleman, and sage.

[Figure 2: see original paper]

The Confucian self Taiji model visually demonstrates that in the self-structure influenced by Confucianism, the small self and large self are like yin and yang—when one waxes, the other wanes, and they can transform into each other under certain conditions. That is, only through active and persistent self-cultivation can the small self be transformed into the large self; but if one is not careful, the large self will regress into the small self. This aligns with the principle of the "sixteen-character mind-to-mind transmission" in the Confucian classic *Book of Documents· Da Yu Mo*: "The human mind is perilous, the mind of Dao is subtle; be refined and single-minded; sincerely hold fast to the mean" (Yang, 2006).

Wang & Wang (2020) further distilled the main viewpoints on self-structure and self-development in Taoism and Buddhism, proposing the "Taoist self Taiji

model" and "Buddhist self Taiji model" that are heterogeneous but isomorphic with the Confucian self Taiji model. In the Taoist self, the yin and yang portions correspond to the "soft self" and "hard self," respectively. The soft self refers to the part of the self that is soft, empty, quiet, simple, non-action, non-desire, natural, and authentic, while the hard self refers to the part that is hard, restless, pretentious, active, desirous, and artificially contrived. According to Taoist self-cultivation theory, the levels of self-cultivation can be divided into four hierarchies: vulgar person, worthy person, sage, and authentic person. In Buddhism, the self is divided into "dust self" (yin) and "pure self" (yang). The dust self, also known as self-attachment, refers to worldly people's attachment to the five aggregates (form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness) as a permanent, autonomous Atman. The pure self, also known as no-self, refers to the true suchness nature that removes the view of the five aggregates as the true permanent self, fundamentally characterized by purity and emptiness. Integrating Buddhism's division of "fruits" (phala) and the theory of ten dharma realms, the levels of Buddhist self-cultivation can be divided into five hierarchies: human-heaven, arhat, pratyekabuddha, bodhisattva, and Buddha.

Overall, the Taiji model of self was constructed by focusing on traditional Chinese culture and critiquing Western self-theories. It embodies the dialectical connotation and dynamic relational nature of the Chinese self and represents an important achievement in recent Chinese self research (李抗, 2020). The Taiji and yin-yang thinking primarily reflected in the Taiji model of self originated from the cosmology in the *Book of Changes*, fully aligning with the yin-yang thinking mode advocated by Chinese people (汪凤炎, 2018; Yang, 2006). The self-level theory generated from the Taiji model of self views the self-development process as a self-cultivation enhancement process, which aligns with the emphasis on self-cultivation and levels of being in Chinese Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist cultural traditions (汪凤炎, 2019b; Wang & Wang, 2021).

5 Characteristics of Chinese Self-Theoretical Research

Over the past decades, under the advocacy of cultural psychology, awareness of psychological indigenization has gradually awakened, with increasing scholars participating in discussions about the Chinese self. Reviewing the representative self-theories mentioned above reveals that the development of Chinese self-theories exhibits the following characteristics:

(1) **From Nonexistence to Existence, From Unidirectional to Pluralistic.** Since the Western value system emphasizes individual independence and highlights personal uniqueness, the "self" has long been a topic of interest for Western scholars (Earley & Gibson, 1998). In contrast, although modern Chinese philosophy has seen sporadic discussions about Chinese cultural self by three generations of New Confucians including Liang Shuming, Mou Zongsan, and Tu Weiming, before the 1980s, psychologists across the three regions of China rarely conducted original research specifically themed on the self (李抗, 汪凤炎, 2019). In 1974, Yang

Guoshu reviewed the few papers involving the Chinese self at that time and noted that "none systematically explored the related factors of self-concept" (杨国枢, 1974). Later, when Yang Chung-fang (1991) reviewed Chinese self research, she found that although the quantity had increased, the substantive content still "remained at a standstill, with little progress in methodology, theory, or practical levels." It was not until 1999 that Yang Guoshu, Huang Guangguo, and other Taiwanese scholars organized the "Chinese Indigenous Psychology Research Excellence Project," one of whose main purposes was "to use indigenous research strategies to explore the operation process, self-concept and knowledge, and self-evaluation of the Chinese self, in order to establish relevant indigenous theoretical systems" as a foundation for further Chinese self research (杨国枢, 2004). Only after this did Yang Guoshu summarize his lifelong research and first propose the "Chinese four-part self theory," which was soon followed by self-theories proposed by other scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the self-theories emerging at this time were all confined within the "individualism-collectivism" framework, with very monotonous and constrained perspectives. Later, some scholars gradually realized that examining Chinese people's self solely through so-called "collectivism" was biased, thus picking up Fei Xiaotong's differential pattern theory and expanding it within the psychological domain (杨中芳, 2009). In recent years, with scholars like Huang Guangguo and Wang Fengyan proposing their protogenetic models, research perspectives on the Chinese self have become increasingly broad.

(2) **From Following to Independent Innovation.** In early 1990s Chinese self research, Western self-theories and concepts were often uncritically copied. Yang Chung-fang (1991) emphasized that Western self-theories at that time could not cover the characteristics of the Chinese self and advocated that Chinese psychologists should devote themselves to developing theories about Chinese "self" to fully understand Chinese "self." It is not difficult to see that the construction of the Chinese self initially viewed Chinese culture from a Western-based perspective, treating Chinese people's self as an "organism" to be dissected on the anatomical table. However, scholars sensitive to Chinese culture gradually realized that to truly understand Chinese people's self, one must delve into the social and historical context of China and into the study of traditional Chinese cultural thought (杨中芳, 2009). Since then, original theories about the Chinese self have gradually emerged. Moreover, in recent years, with increased emphasis on Chinese culture, theories studying the Chinese self have begun to break free from the Western binary framework of "individual-collective" and "independent-interdependent." The theoretical model of "Chinese egoism" has begun to be constructed and valued, and some scholars have started attempting to generate protogenetic theoretical models from Chinese culture, gradually demonstrating Chinese indigenous scholars' profound understanding of their own culture.

(3) **Research Tools Have Gradually Diversified, but Theory and Empiricism Still Need Further Integration.** In the 1990s, not only were theoretical constructions in Chinese psychology research almost entirely imported from the West, but measurement tools related to the "self" were also almost all introduced from the West. When using these tools, researchers rarely considered whether these theories and tools were applicable to Chinese culture. Most research at that time made "post-research" explanations based on data results. Not only were research hypotheses lacking in theoretical grounding, but the research content also had little connection with Chinese society. Consequently, these "research findings" were "at a loss" for understanding Chinese "self" and its impact on social behavior (杨中芳, 1991). After Yang Guoshu launched his indigenous self research project, an increasing number of scales measuring the Chinese self were developed, though these tools mostly measured "individual-collective" oriented self-construal or "bicultural self" theories (杨国枢, 2004). Research on other oriented self-theories still primarily relies on philosophical speculation, sociological surveys, and qualitative research. Although some theories are exquisitely constructed, they lack original experimental paradigms. In short, recent empirical research on Chinese self mostly directly borrows or transports Western cultural psychology research methods, and theoretical research and empirical research need to be further integrated.

Over the past decades, based on reflection on Chinese cultural psychological characteristics, Chinese psychologists have strived to break through the Western-based research stance and propose a series of theoretical models regarding the Chinese self. Summarizing the above, it is not difficult to find that these theories share common features: regardless of the perspective from which the Chinese self is discussed, all emphasize and focus on the relationality between self and others. The difference between Eastern and Western selves lies in the relationship between people and others. The Western self emphasizes human subjectivity, independence, and distinction from others, while the Chinese self focuses on embedding the self within social relationship networks (杨国枢, 陆洛, 2009; 朱滢, 伍锡洪, 2017). This framework roughly outlines psychologists' understanding of the Chinese self. This framework is essentially compatible with theoretical models proposed by Western cultural psychology researchers, but Chinese scholars, starting from different perspectives, provide more concrete, precise, and vivid interpretations for understanding the uniqueness of the Chinese self.

Analyzing the developmental characteristics of Chinese self-theoretical research yields the following implications: First, future research needs to further broaden perspectives, examine the Chinese self from different angles, and delve into Chinese social and historical contexts as well as Chinese cultural thought to continuously enhance the cultural ecological validity of Chinese self-psychological theory explanations (汪凤炎, 2019a). Second, future explorations of Chinese self-psychology need to further break away from the dichotomous stance opposing Western cultural psychology. "Chinese people" and "Chinese culture" should

not only be research objects but also become research subjects. Chinese self-research not only represents "psychology in China" but is also the foundation for genuinely constructing "Chinese psychology" (林崇德, 俞国良, 1996). Finally, adaptive research tools and paradigms need to be developed for relevant theoretical models of the Chinese self to achieve integrated development of Chinese self-research at both theoretical and empirical levels.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.