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# Yang's Cultural-Ecological Psychology: A Perspective for Interpreting Cultural Change

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***Abstract:*** Kuo-Shu Yang (d. 2018) developed a cultural-ecological psychology when researching how personality traits can change under the influence of environmental factors. Such factors can include sociocultural values that might affect personality dispositions and behavior. Within this general perspective, Yang also developed two supplemental theories: (1) a cultural theory of personality motivation that expands on the psychology of Abraham Maslow, and (2) a cultural theory of personality development in which Yang describes the various kinds of adaptation responses that persons exhibit when they encounter cultural change. With respect to such adaptation responses, Yang indicates that the response of cultural integration can support a person's health and continued social functioning. In order to facilitate an acculturation response of integration, Yang recommends the indigenization of new cultural values. In this way, Yang proposes that empirical methods can be indigenized by researchers when they develop culturally-integrated approaches to inquiry in the human sciences.
***Keywords:*** Kuo-Shu Yang, cultural-ecological psychology, cultural change, adaptation, acculturation, cultural integration

Some contemporary researchers in the human sciences working in non-American settings have explored how scientific practice might become better situated within their own cultural traditions (Enriquez, 1977, 1979; Sinha, 1965/2015; Yang, 2006b, 2012). Researchers have similarly pondered how scientific inquiry might be carried out within diverse religious traditions involving canonical texts and associated philosophical commentaries (see Sizemore & Knabb, 2020). The question how such traditional cultural practices and ways of thinking might be brought into dialogue with contemporary theories and methods in the human sciences has engaged numerous thinkers (see the survey of researchers in Allwood & Berry, 2006). Psychologist Kuo-Shu Yang (d. 2018) gave considerable attention to this topic (see also Bond, 2020; Grabenya & Sun, 2015; Yeh, 2020). Yang (2000) maintains that empirical research paradigms in the human sciences can be developed within (or in dialogue with) such ancient cultural traditions (pp. 257–259). Yang's cultural-ecological psychology provides a perspective for understanding how a culturally-integrated approach to research in the human sciences might proceed.

In what follows, I provide an overview of Yang's psychology, giving emphasis to his English publications after 1985. This was the year when Yang (2006a) states that he reformulated his research methodology (p. 301; see also Yeh, 2020, p. 34). In the first part of this essay, I explore Yang's general personality theory. I also examine two supplemental cultural theories that Yang developed, one focused on motivation and another pertaining to personality development. With

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respect to this second supplemental theory, I give special attention to Yang's discussion of adaptation responses that can be elicited by environmental changes. In the second part of the essay, I review Yang's description of modernization as a cultural change. In the third part, I describe Yang's proposal for developing a culturally-integrated approach to scientific research. I close the essay with a discussion that contains critical analysis in relation to broader scholarship as well as a summary of implications.

## Part 1: Personality Theories

### General Cultural-Ecological Personality Theory

Describing his approach to the study of personality "character and behaviour patterns," Yang (1986) states that he adopted an "interactionistic cultural-ecological" perspective as a research paradigm in psychology (p. 149). When developing this perspective, Yang (1981b) was influenced by the work of psychologist John Berry (p. 40; see Berry, 1976, 1994). Berry continues to publish contemporary presentations of his cultural-ecological perspective (see Berry, 2018, 2019, 2023; Mishra & Berry, 2018). In continuity with Berry, Yang (1986) writes that a cultural-ecological perspective "emphasizes the pivotal role of environmental factors in explaining cross-cultural regularities" and observes that certain "ecological characteristics" of the human personality are reinforced through local socialization processes (pp. 149–150). More specifically, Yang (2006b) comments that his research is focused on traits (p. 292). With respect to the meaning of the word "trait," Yang (1986) states that a trait is a characteristic that differentiates one human being from another (p. 108). Yang (2006b) elaborates that his personality research is focused on the structure, dynamics, and development of traits (p. 292).

#### *Personality Trait Structure*

Yang (2006b) refers to a person's beliefs, attitudes, and values as examples of traits that have a certain structure (p. 293). Yang (1986) indicates that while attitudes are distinct from behaviors, attitudes can have "behavioral consequences" (p. 152). Values can also exert a motivational influence on behaviors: Yang (1986) explains that a motivational trait concerns the "why" of behavior (p. 135). Yang (1996) observes that motivations include (a) human needs (for example, seeking achievement or approval) and (b) values or evaluative beliefs (pp. 480–489). When discussing evaluative beliefs, Yang (1986) refers to cultural values (for example, 'respect parents') as informing attitudes (p. 130).

With respect to motivating values, Yang contrasts the cultural values of Asian societies with the cultural values of Western societies (Yu & Yang, 1994, pp. 239–242). Yang (1986) notes that researchers have considered how Chinese personality traits might be influenced by cultural values (p. 149). Some researchers focus in a specific way on ancient Confucian values (Yang, 1986, p. 149). Yang contends that "Confucianism" remains "the dominant value system in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan" (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 240). Yang (1986) indicates that cultural values associated with religions and philosophies such as Confucianism can influence social structures and these structures in turn can affect the development of personality traits (p. 150). Yang (1986) describes the cultural values of the Confucian tradition as collectivistic, past-oriented, and submissive to nature, in contrast with modern values that are individualistic, future-oriented, and seeking mastery over nature (p. 125). Elsewhere, Yang describes Confucian values as emphasizing "interdependent socialization practices, self-control, education and skill learning, [as well as] the fulfillment of

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occupational, familial, and societal obligations" (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 240). Yang elaborates that the "major values" of Confucianism are "benevolence, the practice of moral virtue, and benefitting the world" (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 241). In the same essay, Yang sorts cultural values into broad categories such as family, jobs, communities and groups, as well as dispositions (virtues), for example, "austerity, calmness, humbleness, and self-control" (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 241). The cultural promotion of such values might be described as an effort to develop a personality disposition focused on the satisfaction of 'other-centered' expectations (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 247 and p. 250).

### *Personality Trait Dynamics*

Yang considers trait dynamics in relation to observable human behaviors. Yang (1986) explains that an aptitudinal trait pertains to the "what" of behavior (for example, exercising a skill) while a temperamental trait pertains to the "way or manner" of behavior (p. 135). Yang (1986) refers to emotionality as an example of a temperamental trait (p. 136). Yang (1996) notes that specific temperamental traits can be discerned in behavior that is friendly, hostile, tolerant, or neurotic (pp. 480–489). Yang (2006b) also describes such behaviors as manifesting 'affective reaction patterns' (p. 293).

Yang (2006b) considers the adjustments that people make when reacting to environmental changes (p. 310). Yang (2006b) indicates that any social context can be interpreted as an environment (p. 303). In this way, an environmental change can occur in one's natural environment (ecology) or in one's social environment (or both) (Yang, 2006b, p. 309). Regarding how different persons might adjust to or dynamically react to environmental changes, Yang (2006b) differentiates autoplastic self-adjustment from alloplastic attempts to change one's environment (p. 288). Regarding the dynamics of self-adjustment, Yang (2006b) contends that one's personality can be relatively stable, but it is not necessarily fixed: "As a normally lasting but changeable entity, personality is a kind of *structural system* resulting from a person's continuous effort to maintain a uniform… psychological stability of *dynamic equilibrium*" (p. 309).

### *Trait Dispositions or Syndromes*

Yang (2003b) indicates that personality traits can combine into various dispositions when he states that his cultural-ecological outlook adopts a "dispositional perspective" (p. 265) and that any "psychometric trait approach… tends to focus on internal dispositions" (p. 271). A trait syndrome is a personality disposition comprised of variables such as motivations, attitudes, and temperamental qualities (Yang, 1986, p. 108). Yang (2003b) refers to traditional and modern dispositions as "separate, independent, multidimensional psychological syndromes" (p. 266). As an example of a disposition found among Chinese persons, Yang (2003b) describes the syndrome of traditionality as a "typical pattern of more or less related motivational, evaluative, attitudinal and temperamental traits" (p. 265).

## A Supplemental Cultural Theory of Personality Motivation

### *Cultural Needs*

Yang (2003a) remarks that a researcher might observe the "dynamic process of attitude and value change" in a human population and note that such a process relates to "need change" (p.

235). Motivations derived from cultural values can overlap a person's evaluative beliefs (Yang, 1986, p. 125). Yang emphasizes that cultural values inspire certain practices (for example, honoring ancestors and parents or expressing filial piety) (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 246). In light of these observations, Yang urges researchers "to examine cultural influences on achievement motivation" while keeping in mind that "achievement may exist in many forms" and "the value of achievement may also vary for different cultural groups" (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 244).

### *A Double 'Y' Model*

Regarding motivations, Yang (2003a) argues that Abraham Maslow was not adequately attentive to the influence of culture (pp. 176–177, citing Maslow, 1943, 1954). In response, Yang (2003a) proposes "a radical revision" of Maslow's psychology (p. 177). Yang (2003a) questions whether the need for self-actualization described by Maslow might reflect an American cultural value (or whether this need might manifest itself differently in different cultures) (p. 178). In order to develop Maslow's psychology of motivation, Yang (2003a) calls attention to the work of a Chinese geneticist named Yu who evaluated Maslow's theory (p. 180, citing Yu, 1992).

According to Yang (2003a), Yu proposes a 'Y' model to represent human needs. One set of motivations involves tendencies to satisfy basic survival needs associated with "individual existence" such as need for "food, water, air, sleep, rest, and exercise" as well as environmental safety; such existential needs are represented by the stem or the bottom half of the 'Y'; other second-level needs are represented by the top half of the 'Y' and involve either (a) a "*self* dimension" of expressive needs (namely, interpersonal needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs) or (b) a "*heredity* dimension" involving genetic "transmission" and "reproductive functions" (needs that concern seeking satisfaction of "urges" associated with sexual needs, procreative needs, and parenting needs) (Yang, 2003a, pp. 180–183; pp. 186–187). In terms of the interaction between these different second-level needs, self-expressive needs and heredity needs can be (i) integrated and fused, (ii) subsidized (where one set of needs is subordinated to the other), or (iii) opposed—resulting in conflict (Yang, 2003a, p. 183). According to Yang (2003a), the investment of equal amounts of "life energy" into the search to fulfill both sets of secondary needs can bring about a state of balance with respect to "life processes," yet an unequal investment of "life energy" (due to "internal or environmental obstacles") might block need satisfaction, resulting in a state of imbalance (pp. 183–184).

### *Nature & Culture*

How should the needs represented in the 'Y' model be understood in relation to nature and culture? Yang (2003a) recognizes that while some researchers in the human sciences reject reference to an enduring "human nature" (Yang, 2003a, p. 189, citing Verhave & van Hoorn, 1984), other evolutionary psychologists recognize the validity of such a reference (Yang, 2003a, p. 189, citing Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). Still other researchers denote this common aspect of human beings with the phrase 'genotypic universality' (Yang, 2003a, p. 189, citing Buss, 1984). Yang (2003a) recognizes that without "worldwide survey data," it is difficult to determine which needs are to be associated with genotypic universality ('human nature') and which needs are to be associated with the phenotype of a particular cultural-ecological group; even so, Yang hypothesizes that existential and reproductive needs can be described as genotypic 'natural' needs, while self-expressive needs (interpersonal needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs) are phenotypic

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and 'cultural' (p. 190). Consistent with this perspective on human nature, Yang (2003a) remarks that "survival and reproduction" are "two basic adaptive problems for any organism" (p. 180).

### *Diverse Self-Expressive Needs*

Regarding self-expressive needs, Yang (2003a) contends that the phenotypic cultural variations that arise in actual concrete ways can later be represented when researchers formulate abstract conceptual models (constructs) (p. 221). For example, a researcher might formulate a cultural model representing 'Confucian psychology' (see Liu, 2021). In relation to the observation that human experience admits of phenotypic cultural variations, Yang (2003a) proposes that Yu's model be expanded to a 'double-Y' formulation (p. 180). The additional 'Y' arises when recognizing that self-expressive needs admit of diversity because they are "subject to the influences of the sociocultural environment" (Yang, 2003a, p. 187).

### *Adaptation*

Yang (1998) indicates that when environmental changes affect human beings, such influences can elicit autoplastic responses of self-adjustment (p. 77). Yang (2003a) indicates that phenotypic cultural variations lead to a certain "relativity" of adjustment responses (pp. 236–237). Yang (2003a) elaborates that when the satisfaction of a human need is frustrated due to an environmental change, different adaptation responses are elicited in different "ethnic-cultural groups" because the "adaptive phenotypic plasticity" of human beings varies according to ongoing "interactions between genes and the [local] environment" (Yang, 2003a, pp. 189–190). Despite such ongoing interactions, however, Yang (2003a) argues that certain human motivations have "persisted" because of "their value in helping the human species in general (or certain ethnic-cultural groups in particular) adapt to their environments" (p. 190).

## A Supplemental Cultural Theory of Personality Development

### *Acculturation*

In relation to the topic of how persons psychologically adapt to environmental changes (see also Castro, 2003; Mishra, 1996), recall that Yang (2006b) in his research was interested in the development of personality traits (p. 292). Yang's interest in how personality traits develop over time in reaction to environmental changes led him to formulate another theory to supplement his general cultural-ecological perspective (see Yang, 1996, pp. 492–497). Although Yang (1981a) warns that researchers should not generalize discoveries made with respect to one society and apply them to other societies (p. 169), Yang (1996) contends that his theory concerning the development of personality traits can have valid application for interpreting cultural change outside of Asia (p. 497).

Cultural change is one kind of environmental change. Yang (1998) states that when cultural values are exported to other societies (for example, the promotion of new technology), the process can change social environments and these changes can elicit individual responses of psychological adaptation (p. 77). When the new cultural values become the dominant environmental influence, the adaptation process can be interpreted as an acculturation process (Yang, 1998, p. 88). Yang (1996) writes that when new cultural values are imported to a society and are psychologically internalized by citizens, the exogenous cultural values either coexist with endogenous cultural

values or the citizens experience value conflicts (Yang, 1996, p. 494). Such a conflicted person might tolerate the internal conflict or attempt to reduce it by (a) emphasizing the exogenous cultural values (for example, joining the movement to promote new technology), (b) emphasizing endogenous cultural values (for example, reaffirming traditional values such as those associated with Confucianism), (c) compartmentalizing life domains, or (d) fail to resolve the conflict (Yang, 1996, pp. 496–497).

Yang (1998) describes individual attempts to self-modify in order to resolve a value conflict as exemplified by positive responses such as "accommodation" and "coping" or by negative responses such as "resistance" and "withdrawal" (pp. 78–79). According to Yang (1998), "coping denotes those kinds of cognitive and behavioral processes that are rational, flexible, and systematic in dealing with environmental changes. Coping is strategic, problem-solving, and integrative in orientation" (Yang, 1998, p. 79). When describing the interplay of traditional and modern values as involving "contradictory forces" of "identity" and "change" that for a century have been "intertwining and interacting with each other" in Chinese societies, Yang (1998) presents six possible types of conflict reaction, each representing a "mode of adaptation" in response to an exogenous cultural influence: Total separation, total assimilation, substantial separation, substantial assimilation, compartmentalization, or integration (p. 86). A seventh response is withdrawal which Yang (1998) states is a reaction resulting in failed adaptation or non-adaptation (p. 87). Yang (1998) maintains that the seventh response of withdrawal is what Berry calls marginalization (p. 89; see Berry, 2019, p. 22). With respect to the other six adaptation responses, some responses involve tendencies toward tradition and others involve tendencies toward modernity. Yang (2003b) writes, "Each of these [response] types involves the coexistence of both traditional and modern psychological characteristics, albeit, in different proportions" (p. 281).

### *Total Separation or Assimilation*

Yang (1998) refers to one adaptation response as involving "traditionalistic conservatism" where a person reaffirms that person's endogenous culture and may express concern with "the morals and human conscience of Chinese society" (p. 85). Yang (1998) observes that a person who exhibits this adaptation response can experience insecurity and exhibit resistance to change, a reaction that leads to what Berry calls cultural separation (p. 89; see Berry, 2019, p. 22). At the other extreme, "wholesale Westernization" exemplifies a Chinese adaptation response that entirely embraces change; persons who exhibit this adaptation response may express contempt for their cultural traditions (Yang, 1998, p. 86). According to Yang (1998), Berry refers to this adaptation response as cultural assimilation (p. 89; see Berry, 2019, p. 22).

### *Substantial Separation or Assimilation*

Between the extremes of total separation and total assimilation, Yang (1998) describes two additional adaptation responses that exhibit modes of "coping" with cultural change (p. 87). One coping response emphasizes "traditional learning" as primary, agreeing that modern technology should be learned, but also maintaining that technology should be applied by observing "traditional Chinese ethic principles, social values, and cultural norms" (Yang, 1998, p. 85; see also Wang et al., 2019, p. 2 and Wang & Wang, 2021, p. 4). This adaptation response substantially retains the endogenous cultural tradition, while also adopting select new exogenous values. The opposite mode of adaptation that Yang (1998) describes is one that gives emphasis to the "industrial mode of production" as the primary value to be adopted for the "reconstruction" of Chinese society

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(Yang, 1998, p. 85). This adaptation response involves substantial assimilation to the new cultural influence, yet also retains select older values.

### *Compartmentalization*

Yang (1998) observes that the experience of cultural value conflicts leads some persons to cognitively compartmentalize life domains (pp. 80–83). Yang (1998) describes the compartmentalization response as "ego-defense oriented" (p. 83). Yang (1981a) initially discusses compartmentalization in terms of a person differentiating the exterior life domain of "social behaviors" from the interior life domain of feelings, opinions, and "private intentions" (p. 160). Yang (1996) later expands this account to describe a person who differentiates traditional and modern values: "Cognitive compartmentalization" might occur if a "person consciously divides the inconsistent or conflictual attitudes and values into two or more separate compartments or domains of life" and then subsequently "avoids being aware of attitudes and values in different domains at the same time" (p. 497).

Yang (1998) elaborates that the compartmentalization response is "a kind of ego-defensive mechanism that can effectively prevent… incongruency" (p. 80). To reduce incongruency, a "person actively sets off two or more… cognitions… into two or more domains of life with different logic or rules of operation" (Yang, 1998, p. 80). Yang (1996) refers to ten life domains that can be compartmentalized in this way including marriage, parenting, interpersonal relationships, education, work, politics, and religion (p. 491). As another example, Yang (1998) refers to a person who differentiates the spiritual and material domains of life (pp. 81–82). Yang (1998) also gives the example of a person who is strongly democratic in the political domain, but authoritarian in the family domain (p. 81).

### *Integration*

Another adaptation response in reaction to a new cultural influence involves a person's search for "identity-change balance" (Yang, 1998, p. 86). Yang (1998) observes that Berry calls this kind of acculturation response integration (p. 89; see Berry, 2019, p. 22). Yang (1998) states that the integration response is "free from the adoption of any obvious defensive compartmentalization" (p. 86). At the same time, "this is not to say that no division or categorization whatsoever is involved" (Yang, 1998, p. 87). Regarding acculturation by integration, Yang (2003a) suggests that psychology as a science could research the "specific strategies" that persons employ "in their attempt to create a balanced motivational system for effective adjustment to modern life" (p. 236).

### *Organismic Integration*

The adaptation response of seeking cultural integration will affect one's overall personality. Yang (2003a) touches on this point when he remarks that "the dynamic processes of need interaction, integration, and transformation at the individual level" work toward resolving intra-individual conflicts (p. 236). Elsewhere, Yang states that this "dynamic process of constantly resolving conflicts" involves "a synthetic tendency" that is aimed at "organismic integration" (Lu & Yang, 2006, pp. 169–170). Such a synthetic tendency is twofold involving (a) an individual-oriented "tendency towards unity in one's self" (a tendency toward the integration of personality

"subsystems") as well as (b) a group-oriented "tendency towards acting in a coherent and meaningful way with others" (Lu & Yang, 2006, pp. 169–170; see also Kâğitçibaşi, 1987).

### *Integration By Means of Transformative Reconciliation*

Recall that Yang (2003a) emphasizes that the particular cognitive responses that persons exhibit during psychological adaptation will involve "cultural relativity" (pp. 236–237). Yang (1998) describes one relative strategy for cultural integration as a "creative cultural transformation" where "traditional symbols, thoughts, values, and behavorial patterns are selected, reorganized and/or modified [in a way that is] beneficial to the living of a modern life and the maintenance of [one's] cultural identity" (p. 85). Yang (1998) proposes that this transformation process be regulated by guiding meta-values such as "freedom and the development of democracy" (p. 85). Discussing this "integrating type" of adaptation response, Yang (2003a) writes that it "is the result of the individual's active persistent effort" to realize "a balanced, coherent [personality] system" located "at a higher level" (pp. 235–236; see also Peng et al., 2006, p. 256). Yang (1998) describes this cognitive process when he refers to the "rational selection [of values] for best combination" as when a Chinese person proceeds by "rationally combining the good elements or aspects of Chinese and Western cultures, while discarding the bad ones" (p. 85). Yang's description of this process suggests that he might interpret it as involving what is called a 'sublation' where a person (a) rejects certain parts of two viewpoints that are irreconcilable and then (b) 'takes up' other reconcilable parts into a new synthesis (see Li, 2018, pp. 43–44 and p. 50).

### *Integration By Means of Specific Dissociations & Reassociations*

Yang (1998) observes that some persons express new combinations of cultural values after undergoing various processes of cognitive dissociation and reassociation (pp. 80–83). Yang (1998) describes the dissociation-reassociation adaptation response as "problem-solving oriented" (p. 83). With respect to these kinds of processes, there can be (1) a *transformation of meaning* that involves dissociating a behavior from its traditional meaning, then reassociating that behavior with a new modern meaning (Yang, 1998, pp. 81–82). Yang (1998) gives the example of a woman who remains a widow out of free choice and not because she feels compelled to adopt the traditional role of relict (*shǒu guǎ*, 守寡) (p. 90). Yang (1998) also gives the example of expressing political fidelity (*zhōng chéng*, 忠誠) where the behavior is no longer bound up with the traditional meaning of expressing loyalty to an emperor (Yang, 1998, p. 90). There can also be (2) a *transformation of function* that involves dissociating a behavior from its traditional function and then (a) reassociating that behavior with a new modern function or (b) associating a traditional function with a new behavior (as when a person no longer verbally recites a Buddhist chant, but rather listens to a modern audio recording of that chant) (Yang, 1998, p. 82 and p. 91). Further, there can be (3) a *transformation of instrumental function* that involves dissociating use of an instrument from its traditional function and then (a) reassociating use of that instrument with a new modern function or (b) associating a traditional function with a new instrument (as when a person uses an electronic light in a Buddhist religious ritual rather than a candle) (Yang, 1998, pp. 82–83 and p. 90).

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## Part 2: Modernization

### Modernization & New Cultural Values

Yang (2003a) describes modernization as a process where non-Western persons are affected by the social introduction of new cultural values promoting political, industrial, and technological change (p. 235). When discussing the history of modernization, Yang (1998) maintains that this cultural tradition is evident in England in the 1600s (p. 75). Yang may have in mind *The Great Instauration* by Francis Bacon (1620–1626/2016) which proposes in its second part (the *novum organum*) a new scientific methodology to replace the ancient logical works of Aristotle. By proposing new philosophical, political, and methodological values, the process of modernization—as described by Yang (1988)—is observed to affect numerous aspects of social systems, including education, religion, and human communication (p. 67). Yang (1996) differentiates (a) the kind of modernization that is endogenous to a society (where modernization occurs from within a society in accordance with interior motivations to develop) from (b) the kind of modernization that involves exogenous influence (where modernization occurs due to exterior pressure from other societies, for example, by means of economic sanctions) (p. 479). Yang (2003b) notes that classic modernization theory has been critiqued for "equating modernization with Westernization" (p. 264). Yang (1988) rejects identifying modernization with Westernization, but he agrees that modernization first occurred in Western societies (p. 68).

### Traditional & Modern Personality Syndromes

Pointing to Taiwan as an example, Yang (1981a) observes that the effects of modernization involve observable social changes such as the promotion of cultural diversification and pluralistic civic participation; through the introduction of such egalitarian social structures, modernization can subsequently affect the personality dispositions of individuals (pp. 160–161, p. 168; see also Yang, 1996, p. 480; 2003a, pp. 234–235). Yang (1981a) observes that a change of Chinese personality traits due to the importation of new cultural values can occur during education at centers of higher learning: "there is a substantial correlation between one's education level and his individual modernity" (pp. 167–168). Yang notes that Chinese persons who are "high in individual modernity" are less inclined to appeal to predestination or fate (*yuán*, 緣) in order to explain the development of new relationships or the cessation of old relationships (Yang & Ho, 1988, p. 278). On the other hand, Yang also remarks that, "The idea of yuan is still very much alive in contemporary Chinese culture," although it is becoming less associated with beliefs concerning "predestined reincarnation" and "fatalistic conceptions have lost the fantastic or even superstitious elements characteristic of past conceptions" (Yang & Ho, 1988, pp. 279–280).

In contrast with a person who exhibits a modern pattern of traits, Yang (1981a) describes a person who has a traditional personality as exhibiting a "predisposition" or "tendency" toward a different "behavior syndrome" or "behavior patterns" (for example, such a person might adopt a "nonoffensive strategy" when working to satisfy needs because that person is motivated by cultural values such as "harmony maintenance" and "social acceptance") (p. 159). A person with a traditional disposition may "behave in consonance with social expectations and/or role imperatives at the expense of the actor's personal feelings, opinions, or will" (Yang, 1981a, p. 160). Referring to experiments using factor analysis, Yang (2003b) maintains that a traditional personality pattern is associated with traits such as "submission to authority, filial piety and ancestor worship, conservatism and endurance, fatalism and defensiveness, and male dominance" (pp. 266–267; see

also Yang, 2006a, p. 301; Yang, 2006b, p. 286). For examples of other Chinese cultural beliefs and values associated with a traditional orientation, Yang (2006b) not only mentions belief in predestined relationships (*yuán*, 緣) and the practice of filial piety (*xiào dao*, 孝道), but also expressing affectionate gratitude to spouses (*ēn qíng*, 恩情) (p. 299 and p. 301). Other traditional Chinese cultural values include a concern with moral face (*liǎn*, 臉), a concern with social face or reputation (*miàn zi*, 面子) (Yang, 2006b, p. 303), observing rules for the exchange of social favors (*rén qíng*, 人情) (p. 305), and adopting a cognitive style that references a criterion of balance, that is, a 'golden mean' (*zhōng yōng*, 中庸) (p. 305; see also Chan, 1963, pp. 95–114; Moran, 1993).

According to Yang (2003b), factor analysis experiments indicate that different traits are associated with a modern personality pattern: "egalitarianism and open-mindedness, social isolation and self-reliance, optimism and assertiveness, affective hedonism, and sex equality" (p. 267; see also Yang, 1988, p. 80; Yang, 2006a, p. 301). Yang (2003b) contends that modern personality traits emerged in "industrial societies" in a way that was "most useful [for] adjusting to life in such a society" (Yang, 2003b, p. 276). Such modern traits involve a "sense of personal efficacy," "low integration with relatives," "egalitarian attitudes," "openness to innovation and change," an "individualistic orientation," and "independence or self-reliance" (Yang, 1988, p. 77; see also Yang, 2006b, p. 287).

Yang (1986) recalls how he developed an assessment scale to measure the modern traits of Chinese persons (p. 152). This measurement instrument focused in part on attitudes concerning family, education, politics, and economics (Yang, 1986, p. 152). Yang (2003b) states that he initially assumed that the relationship between traditional and modern Chinese personality traits involved their distribution across a bipolar continuum (p. 265; see also Yang, 2006a, p. 301). These presuppositions seem aligned with "classical modernization theory" which according to Yang (1996) explained modernization as a unidirectional development process where persons transition across a spectrum of traits (from traditional to modern) (p. 490).

Yang (2003b) remarks that he began to question whether traditional and modern Chinese personality traits might not be distributed across a single "unidimensional psychological continuum," but rather involve "two separate, independent, multidimensional psychological syndromes" or "two sets of psychological orientations" (pp. 265–267; see also Yang, 2006a, p. 301). Yang (2006a) describes his design of two new and separate assessment scales to measure each syndrome (p. 301). Yang (1996) states that it was around 1985 when he adopted the "new assumption that traditionalism and modernism are two separate or different psychological syndromes" (p. 491). Yang (2006a) states that when he approached the two personality patterns from this new point of view, it became apparent to him that only one specific pair of traits exhibited linear bipolar opposition (namely, the traditional value of 'male dominance' opposed the modern value of 'sex equality') (p. 301). Aside from this discrepancy, Yang (2006a) maintains that his experimental results confirm his hypothesis that the two syndromes are distinct (p. 301).

### *Bicultural Personality Theory*

Yang (2006a) argues that his experimental results illustrate that many traditional personality "components" can "coexist with, rather than be replaced by" modern personality "components" (p. 301). Yang (1988) maintains that certain persons are "able to synthesize" traditional traits with "modern characteristics" (pp. 81–82). In a different text, Yang (1996) again contends that traditional values (such as moral self-cultivation, filial piety, and paternalism) can be integrated with modern values (such as use of a scientific method or engaging in utilitarian thinking

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when appropriate) (pp. 491–492). Yang indicates that a person who exhibits both sets of personality patterns simultaneously may be described as bicultural (see Lu & Yang, 2006, p. 169–170; see also LaFramboise et al., 1993; Tadmor et al., 2009; Tran et al. 2024).

### Modernization & Personality Trait Convergence

Yang (1988) observes that some thinkers believe that modernization will eventually lead to a global convergence in a "universal pattern of modernity" that will involve not only common social institutions, but also a set of global values (p. 69). Yang (1988) notes that if there is a global convergence into one set of universal values, one might also expect a correlated "psychological convergence" of traits (p. 69). Yang (1988) recognizes that the hypothesis of a global psychological convergence (where people become "similar to each other") contains numerous implications (for example, societies with a higher number of modern institutions might exhibit a proportionately larger number of people with similar "psychological characteristics") (p. 70). Yang (1988) admits the possibility of a global convergence of traits to a certain extent when he states, "As a matter of degree, this variation in cross-cultural [trait] composition may just be a reflection of the fact that the societies compared are at different stages of… modernization" (p. 79). At the same time, Yang (2003b) makes the prediction that modernization will result not in a global convergence of personality traits, but only in a partial convergence (p. 280). More specifically, Yang (1988) makes the prediction that, "Only those sets of traditional psychological characteristics that are specific-functional will gradually [be] replaced by the same set of modern psychological characteristics" (p. 85). Yang (1988) explains that such "specific-functional characteristics" involve industrial skills that will replace traditional aptitudinal traits such as agricultural and hunting skills (p. 84).

## Part 3: Endogenous Cultivation of a Scientific Psychology

### Indigenous Psychology

Yang's student Kwang-Kuo Hwang (2019) remarks that Yang "had a passion for [the] modernization of Chinese society" (p. 5; see also Hwang, 2003, p. 287; 2019, p. 5; Hwang & Yang, 1972). Yang (2003b) agrees that in his youth he was committed to advancing the process of modernization in Asia (p. 263). However, Yang (2003b) recalls that around 1985 he "deliberately tried to detach from the debates on sociological theories of societal modernity" and he revised his research assumptions (p. 264). Yang (1997a) maintains that his mature research design reflects his own "intellectual and professional transformation from a Westernised Chinese psychologist to an indigenous Chinese psychologist" (p. 73).

What is an indigenous psychologist? Yang (1997a) describes the effort to indigenize modern scientific research practices in Asia by developing a culturally-integrated approach (p. 71). Regarding this approach, Yang (1997a) explains that an Asian psychologist should not uncritically adopt or prioritize Western theories, or think in terms of Western languages, or politicize research, but rather be attentive to when "something indigenous emerges in his or her phenomenological field," to "let Chinese ideas, values, and ways of thinking be fully reflected in his or her research thinking process," and in general "to let research be based upon the Chinese intellectual tradition rather than the Western intellectual tradition" (p. 72).

Allwood (2019) notes that due to the cultural "overlap" that can result from ongoing international exchanges, Yang does not believe that it is possible for researchers to develop purely indigenous psychological sciences (p. 91, citing Yang, 2012). Rather, for researchers interested in

cultivating indigenous research design, Yang (2000) suggests that researchers seek to synthesize "the knowledge system" of modern scientific studies with the researcher's "own traditional knowledge system" associated with a geographical, religious, and/or spiritual culture (p. 259). Yang (2000) argues that if disproportionate emphasis is given to modern scientific theories only, the outcome will be "different from a *balanced integration* of the local and imported knowledge systems [where] the two [systems] are authentically synthesized" (p. 260).

### *Consideration of Ancient Psychologies*

Yang (1997a) indicates that the integration of contemporary empirical research into the Chinese cultural tradition will require study of "the psychological functioning" of "ancient Chinese" persons by reading classic texts (p. 72). Yang models this process by studying the ancient personality theory of Chinese sage Liu Shao (c. 250 AD). Yang (1997b) observes that, "Liu's theory was primarily proposed as a system for the appraisal of the ancient Chinese personality" (p. 243). Yang (1997b) notes that Liu Shao draws on the Daoist and Confucian philosophical values of harmony and equilibirum in order to develop a "trait theory" (p. 238). In the classic text *Jen-Wu Chih*, Liu Shao describes personality traits associated with temperament (*xíng jìng*, 行徑) as well as innate talent and accomplishment (*zài néng*, 在能) (Yang, 1997b, pp. 238–243; see also Shryock, 1937; Yang, 2006b, p. 308). Yang (1997b) maintains that such an ancient personality theory might be compared with contemporary personality theories based on factor analysis or with the American "Big Five" trait theory (p. 243; see also Yang & Bond, 1990).

### *Indigenous Compatibility*

Yang (2000) argues that scientific theories associated with empirical research should exhibit "congruity" with "the natural elements, structure, mechanism, or process of the studied phenomenon embedded in its context," in other words, theories should exhibit "*indigenous compatibility*" (p. 250; see also Yang, 2006b, p. 296). Yang (2000) states that a researcher who is a member of the culture under investigation can by means of "an intuitive or self-reflective process" discern whether an exogenous theory is "congruent with his or her own relevant native psychological characteristics" (p. 250). Yang (2000) refers to this self-discernment as a test of reflective indigenous compatibility (p. 250). More specifically, if a theory originates from a different culture, a researcher might assess whether certain psychological "properties" proposed in the theory exhibit cross-cultural "structural equivalence" with the traits exhibited in the researcher's local context (Yang, 2000, p. 253). Yang (2000) explains that such traits are "qualitative psychological or behavioral patterns" (p. 253). In addition to discernment of possible cross-cultural equivalence between the structures of two behavior patterns, the structure of the other 'qualitative psychological patterns' mentioned here would pertain to the various kinds of personality traits mentioned previously, for example, beliefs, attitudes, and values (Yang, 2006b, p. 293).

Yang (2003a) recommends that in order to avoid "imposed-etic and other culturally biased" outcomes, scientific hypotheses should be tested by developing "*indigenous* approaches... so that… *indigenous compatibility* can be effectively achieved" (p. 228). Regarding what Yang means by the phrase 'imposed-etic', he is concerned about imposing a theory on a population that is culturally exogenous in origin (see also Berry, 1989; Flores & Lee, 2019, p. 48; Sisemore & Knabb, 2020, p. 4; Sue et al., 2019, p. 29). For example, Yang (2003a) questions whether various theories proposed

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by American psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg have full empirical validity when applied to non-American populations (p. 178).

### *Indigenous Cultural Psychology*

Chakkarath (2024) describes indigenous psychology as one perspective among others in the academic field of cultural psychology. Yang (1997a) outlines how inquiry might proceed within such an "indigenised research strategy" (p. 70; see also Sundararajan, 2019b, p. 82; Yang, 2006b). Yang (1997a) lists several tasks to complete in order to develop such a research paradigm, including the assembly of an indigenous team, publishing empirical studies and books, as well as establishing an academic journal (p. 70). Yang (2003a) remarks that indigenous cultural psychologies can be developed in a variety of geographical contexts, of which American psychology would comprise one variation (p. 177; see also Sundararajan, 2019a, p. 66, citing Yang, 2012).

In order to develop a culturally-integrated research paradigm, Yang (2006b) recommends "the integrative analysis of indigenized studies on Chinese personality… in terms of individual and social orientations" (p. 285). Research might proceed by "synthesizing both the dispositional [i.e. personality trait] and cultural psychological approaches with the hope that a systematic picture will emerge" (Yang, 2006b, p. 291). In order to promote such a research synthesis, Yang (2006b) suggests that studies focus on discerning the influence of cultural values on behaviors (p. 298).

### *Indigenous Religious Psychology*

Yang indicates that research examining the relationship between values and behaviors might benefit from recognizing that persons can engage in the *self-cultivation* of traits after they study the classic texts of religious and philosophical traditions (on self-cultivation, see Gowans, 2021; Zhao et al., 2024). For example, Yang observes that certain Confucian "values, such as filial piety and loyalty" influence behaviors; such values are discussed in the *Three Character Classic*" (*Sān zì jīng*; 三字經), a Confucian work composed during the Song dynasty in the 13th century (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 242; p. 250n1; see also Giles, 1901, p. 251). In light of these observations, Yang (2000) proposes that indigenous psychological research might be conducted within other religious cultures such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (p. 259). Citing Yang (2012), Pankalla & Kośnik (2018) explicitly refer to this kind of indigenous psychology as a *religious psychology* (pp. 155–156). Dueck and Marossy (2019) enhance Yang's proposal for cultivating indigenous religious psychologies by suggesting the development of indigenous psychologies of spirituality (p. 124, citing Yang, 1997a; see also Dueck, 2020).

## A Multi-Methods Approach

Yang (2003a) states that while he recognizes the empirical validity of a researcher's anecdotal reflections on life experience and specific sets of data, these sources of knowledge need to be expanded by generalizations based on experimental research in order to obtain a more complete psychological science (p. 229). Yang (1986) encourages researchers to employ "rigorous empirical methods" in their study of traits and not simply to highlight the behavioral prescriptions found in the "Chinese classics" in order to understand personality patterns (p. 106). With respect to use of empirical methods, Yang (1997a) suggests "a multiparadigm approach" for inquiry where "any research method or strategy, ranging from the quantitative approach with a positivistic

orientation to the qualitative approach with a hermeneutic, phenomenological, or narrative orientation, may be used" (p. 73; on the phenomenological approach, see Wendt, 2024).

Yang designed his own experimental studies. For example, early in his career he co-designed research that explored Rorschach responses obtained from civilians in Taiwan (see Yang et al., 1963). Similarly, Yang (2003a) discusses the experimental research implications of his 'double-Y' theory. Yang's factor analysis experiments concerning personality syndromes have already been mentioned (Yu & Yang, 1994, p. 248; Yang, 2003b, p. 276). Elsewhere, Yang (2006b) recommends not only use of factor analysis, but also use of latent structure analysis (p. 297).

## Toward a Global Science

Yang (2000) predicts that if researchers follow culturally-integrated approaches to the development of the human sciences, multiple indigenous psychologies can emerge and these psychologies can in turn be "gradually integrated into a global psychology" (Yang, 2000, p. 258; see also Allwood, 2019, p. 94; Liu, 2020; Sundararajan, 2020). The process that Yang (2000) proposes for working toward a global psychology is complex (see also Allwood, 2020). When working toward this goal, Yang (2000) recommends that researchers differentiate (a) structural traits from (b) functional traits because "identical psychological or behavioral characteristics may have different functions in the compared cultures" (p. 258).

# Part 4: Discussion

## Critical Analysis in Relation to Broader Scholarship

In continuity with Sundararajan (2020) who evaluates Yang's work and makes some proposals for its development, I close this essay with a brief discussion of several critical questions that a researcher might ask who is interested in exploring Yang's perspective. These questions touch on concerns related to broader scholarship in cultural psychology.

(1) Following the definition of indigenous psychology proposed by Ratner (2008), Long (2019a) critiques the realist ontology of Hwang, Yang's student, as incommensurable with the putative requirement that any indigenous psychology must presuppose a philosophy of social constructionism and therefore subscribe to "ontological relativism" (p. 115; see also Long, 2019b, p. 130). What Ratner (2008) means by "ontological relativism" seems to entail belief that the *being* of "psychological phenomena" is dependent on social intersubjectivity (p. 65). What implications might Yang's perspective have for this discussion regarding the ontological interpretation of psychological phenomena? Given that psychological phenomena include behavioral motivations, how might the 'double-Y' theory of Yang (2003a) contribute to this discussion (especially with respect to Yang's hypothesis that existential and heredity needs are universal)?

(2) Lu and Yang (2006) cite Hong et al. (2000) regarding the complex personality structure exhibited by bicultural persons. How might research into the psychological process of 'cultural frame switching' on the part of bicultural persons further enrich Yang's theory (see Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2003, p. 455; Luna et al., 2008; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2002)?

(3) Would Yang's 'double-Y' theory benefit from being developed into a 'multi-Y' theory that recognizes that persons can exhibit not only two cultural syndromes, but multiple cultural syndromes (see also Morris et al., 2015)?

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(4) Can Yang's account of cultural integration be enriched by considering, as did Yang's student Hwang (2011), Piaget's discussion of cognitive equilibration as an adaptation response to environmental change (p. 331, citing Piaget, 1977)?

(5) Instead of describing cultural integration as the development of a 'higher' level of personality (see Yang, 2003a, pp. 235–236), would it be accurate to describe a successful psychological adaptation simply as that person's ongoing maintenance of organismic balance?

(6) Consider the following remarks of Yang: (a) Yang (2000) states that an authentic indigenous psychology will exhibit a "balanced integration" of traditional and scientific content (p. 260), (b) Yang (2003a) states that personality integration will involve a "balanced motivational system" (p. 236), and (c) Yang (2006b) refers to a traditional cognitive outlook where a person proceeds according to a sense of 'balance', that is, according to an intuition of a golden mean (*zhōng yōng*, 中庸) (p. 305; see also Chan, 1963, pp. 95–114; Moran, 1993). Is it that healthy adaptation responses might be supported when persons cultivate such a cognitive outlook (see Yang, 2006b, pp. 305–306; see also de Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017; Peng et al., 2006; Peng & Nisbett, 1999, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers & Peng, 2018)?

## Summary of Implications

- Cultural-ecological psychology explores personality trait patterns or syndromes involving aptitudinal traits (behaviors, skills), temperamental traits (qualities), and motivational traits (biological needs and cultural values such as virtues)
- Introduction of new values into an environment might elicit autoplastic (self-modification) responses in attempt to adapt to cultural change
- Adaptation responses to new values can involve (1) total separation or assimilation, (2) substantial separation or assimilation, (3) compartmentalization, or (4) integration
- Cultural integration might involve (1) a transformative reconciliation, and/or (2) specific behavior-function dissociations and reassociations, and/or (3) some other process
- Modernization (promotion of science, technology, and industry) introduces new cultural values into non-Western societies
- Successful cultural integration can result in persons exhibiting bicultural personality syndromes
- Indigenous development of scientific psychologies promotes cultural integration

## Ethical Considerations

This research study involved a literature review and did not require authorization by an Institutional Review Board.

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## Notes on Contributor

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