In Search of the Chinese in All the Wrong Places!

WEINING C. CHANG
National University of Singapore

This paper discusses some theoretical and methodological issues in studying the psychology of the Chinese people. To study Chinese psychology, we must first identify who it is that we call “Chinese.” Approaches that identify participants as “Chinese” based on geographical location, language, or religion are argued to be misleading. Instead, a person’s sense of identification with Chinese culture may provide a better frame of reference in defining Chineseness. Cross-cultural studies that conclude differences between Chinese and non-Chinese reflect primarily cultural effects are also problematic because many contextual variables other than culture may be involved. Finally, it is argued that the vernacular culture that common people endorse (the beliefs and values held by ordinary folks who identify themselves as Chinese) instead of academic Confucian doctrines may be a more appropriate focus of study in understanding Chinese people’s psychology.

The late 20th century has been said to be the “century of ethnicity” (Shweder, 1990). As such, the Chinese have become the “flavor of the month” in psychological investigations. In the 1990s there have been a

This commentary was prepared while the author was on sabbatical leave and attached to the Ethnic Studies Department of University of California at Berkeley. I thank Lingchi Wang for his stimulating discussion on the concept of being Chinese. Correspondence Address: Weining C. Chang, Department of Social Work & Psychology, National University of Singapore, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore, 119260, Tel: 65-8746121, Fax: 65-77781213. E-mail: swkweicc@nus.edu.sg
proliferation of studies of the Chinese in psychology. This is evident in the publication of a review chapter on the Chinese in the *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Wang, 1994) and the 1996 publication of the *Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, edited by Bond (1996). Research studies that include Chinese as participants can now also be found in major U.S. and international journals. There might be a variety of motivations for people’s interest in the psychology of the Chinese people. These diverse motives, however, seem to converge on one common goal: to describe, to explain, and, finally, to predict and to manage the behaviors of the Chinese.

As an ethnic Chinese and a psychologist, I initially found this phenomenon to be quite exciting. However, upon reviewing many of the studies, I became confused and disappointed. My disappointment, I hope, is not a reflection of an ethnocentric concern, that only Chinese can explain the Chinese. In fact, many of the researchers were ethnic Chinese themselves. Nor is it caused by a nationalistic sentiment that one cannot say anything critical about the Chinese. Rather, I believe that my frustration was caused to a great extent by the looming possibility — we are looking for the Chinese in all the wrong places!

**What Is Chinese? Who Are the Chinese?**

To begin with, the Chinese are not an easily identifiable group of people. The more I look, the more I am confused as to what a Chinese is or what makes one Chinese. Being Chinese cannot be identified on the basis of race. There are many different anthropological groups that are all classified as Chinese. Therefore, strictly speaking, there is not a single race called “Chinese.” The people whom we normally consider to be “Chinese” are made up by a majority of Han people, themselves quite diverse in genetic characteristics, and a little over 50 different ethnic minorities residing in China. There are also many Chinese who may be “racially” Chinese but do not behave like “Chinese.” Thus, as Zukerman (1990) noted, it is a dubious practice to classify people by race for psychological studies. The Chinese cannot be classified by language either, because, among the Chinese, there are many different linguistic groups speaking languages or dialects as different from one another as French is from German. Nor can they be classified by geographic location, as that actually would make things much worse, for the Chinese, like the Jews and (Asian) Indians, are found all over the world. They live in China proper, Southeast Asia, North and South America, Europe, and even in Africa (Zhuang, 1998). They cannot be classified by religion: The Chinese, when it comes to religion, are very tolerant. A Chinese can be a Buddhist, a Taoist, a Muslim, a Christian, or an atheist. What, then, makes one Chinese? Who are the people that we call Chinese?

According to many influential scholars of the Chinese, being Chinese is a cultural definition! (Huntington, 1996); a definition on the basis of the culture lived by the people (Tu, 1991, 1994). Those who subscribe to and live by the culture, or a substantial portion of the culture, are called Chinese. Such a definition seems to be quite appropriate for many overseas Chinese — huagiao who do not live in China proper and who are not under the jurisdiction of or possess the nationality of China. One thing that characterizes the majority of huagiao is the preservation of a culture that they call Chinese (Huntington, 1996). The defining characteristic of the people normally called Chinese is therefore the culture (Tu, 1991). Being Chinese is a cultural definition; the study of the psychology of the Chinese is a study of the culture, or the cultural psychology, of the Chinese.

**Approaching Chinese Psychology as a Cultural Psychology**

What is a cultural psychology? How do we do cultural psychology? If I read Shweder (1990) correctly, cultural psychology is the study of the psychology of a people within the context of their culture. One cannot make sense, or at least one cannot make the same sense, of the behavior of a person as it was intended without understanding the “framework of meaning” within which the actor conducts the behavior. Stimuli (S) and responses (R) and S-R relationships are perceived, interpreted, and responded to by a person according to the ways the S, the R, and the S-R are interpreted by the actor. The meanings of the S, the R, and the S-R relationship are not determined by the experimenter, nor the psychologist, but by the “participant” — the actor. A psychologist can approximate the meanings of S, R, and S-R, if the psychologist shares the culture of the participants. Culture is the context, and an inescapable context in which S, R, and S-R come to have meanings. Culture is the guiding framework whereby certain stimuli come to signal specific behaviors. With cultural psychology, we are not only manipulating the S, recording the R, and analyzing the S-R relationship, we are also doing all of the above by being intimately aware of and informed by the cultural context in which the process takes place.
Unfortunately, few of us who are searching for the Chinese are doing this. Most of us are searching for the Chinese in the wrong places.

Potential Sources of Information: Established Journals of the West and Ethnopsychology of the Chinese — the Need for Critical Review and Judicial Selection

We who are searching for the Chinese often begin our search by scanning existing literature about the Chinese. Our sources are mainly the following: established journals, mostly published in the West, and the body of knowledge of human behaviors originated by the Chinese — Chinese ethnopsychology. After reviewing some of the literature from these sources, I came away with a realization that we have to view information from these sources with a critical eye and use them only with judicial selection.

Established Journals of the West

Each journal has its implicit values and assumptions — in other words, each journal has its own culture; the purpose of peer review is to maintain “scientific” standards. However, by subjecting scientific studies to “peers” of established scientists, we are also subjecting our studies to the interpretation and evaluation of an established culture, of which the Chinese is not a part. As of late, it might be safe to say, there has not been a critical mass of psychologists with sufficient familiarity of the Chinese culture in Western established circles to serve as peers for reviewing studies of the Chinese.

Science, psychology included, is a peculiar enterprise of cross-validation. In order to publish in the journals of America, many of us have been admonished by the editor that a contrasting group of “Americans” is needed as the benchmark against which participants of other cultures, such as the Chinese, are compared. In selecting topics for research, we have also been advised by journal editors to address issues that are of interest and relevance to the journal audience, mostly Western psychologists. Researchers, attempting to fulfill these requirements, armed with established constructs and “standard” procedures, have conducted surveys and experiments with the Chinese as participants of a comparison group. As a result, in established journals published in the West, the few studies that involve Chinese participants focus on the contrast of Chinese against American participants. From these studies, elegant and vigorous as they might be, we cannot find the Chinese. What we will find is simply whether Chinese and Americans are the same or different along this or that behavioral dimension. But these types of studies are not studies of Chinese psychology; they are studies of basic principles via the study of Chinese-Western differences or similarities.

Ethno-Indigenous Psychology of the Chinese

As a people of an ancient culture, the Chinese have accumulated an impressive body of knowledge with which to make sense of their psychological world. This is the ethnopsychology of the Chinese. However, an ethnopsychology of the Chinese, or the Chinese understanding of psychology, is not the psychology of the Chinese. In the same way, the body of knowledge of Chinese medicine is not the health condition of the Chinese. Like Chinese medicine, ethnopsychology of the Chinese is a part of Chinese culture. By studying the ethnopsychology of the Chinese, we can gain a better understanding of the collective belief systems of how Chinese think they behave, but not necessarily how Chinese actually behave. I believe that the ethnopsychology of any culture represents an important facet, perhaps the most important and relevant facet so far as human behaviors are concerned, of the culture. Ethnopsychology can help the psychologist to gain an understanding of the people in terms of how they think about themselves, but ethnopsychology is not the psychology of the people itself. What we need is an indigenization of psychology (Yang, 1996), making psychology valid and relevant to the people within the context of their native culture.

All the Wrong Places

Wrong Place One: Demographic Chinese

As mentioned earlier, being Chinese is an ethnic definition. It involves adhering to and living by the ways of the Chinese. Being Chinese is not a demographic designation or a census (as in the United States) category. However, when I read the psychological studies that were conducted with the “Chinese,” I found that the definitions of Chinese in these studies are often demographic designations, the demographic label of Chinese.
For studies that were conducted outside of areas where the Chinese are a majority, surnames are used as a proxy measure of being Chinese. Whether one with a Chinese sounding surname is a Chinese in the sense that he subscribes to the culture of the Chinese or not is a question whose answer is illusive. For example, Lee is a common Chinese surname, but is also an English name. General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate army in the U.S. Civil War possibly had no Chinese influence in his life. Lee could also be a Korean or a Vietnamese name. The most popular Chinese surname, Chang, is also a Korean name. Therefore, using a surname as an indicator of being Chinese is not a very safe practice.

If one goes to communities identified as Chinese to collect data, one may very likely obtain a sample that is made mostly of Chinese participants. However, this practice also has its share of problems.

Though great similarities exist between the cultures of peoples identified as Chinese in different parts of the world, specific differences across different regions may be critically relevant to some psychological processes.

If we accept the premise that what makes the Chinese “Chinese” is their culture, then I propose that we must look for Chinese psychology, the psychology of a people informed by their culture, where it is, in the culture of the Chinese. This culture should not be assumed, but must be identified by studying the normal everyday practices of the participants.

Most scholars of Chinese culture seem to agree that there is a set of core values of the Chinese. This core set of values is assumed to basically follow the Confucianist and, to a lesser extent, the Taoist and Buddhist traditions. However, regional variations of the culture are often not taken into consideration when psychological studies are conducted on the Chinese.

Students from major universities in large coastal cities in the People’s Republic of China have been the favorite subjects in many of these studies. Are they Chinese? Yes, they are. However, are they Chinese in the same sense as the 80% of the Chinese who live in the countryside and are less educated? Psychologists, notably Cole (1997), found that the literate and the illiterate have different “cultures.” One may talk about the culture of the great Confucian classic tradition as Chinese culture. However, for the ordinary peasant living in the countryside, it is the great tradition as operationalized and interpreted by the ordinary people into a set of practices and a way of life that is the “culture” relevant to these people. So when we obtain data from university students in the cities, the data reflects a kind of Chinese culture. But before we generalize these findings to the majority of the peasant population, we have to be very careful in identifying the similarities and differences between the Chinese culture of the university students and the Chinese culture of the less privileged population. When researchers conduct psychological studies in the U.S., with North American participants, they seem to be aware of the limitation of using university students (for instance Sears, 1986). However, when they conduct research with the Chinese, they seem to feel freer to overlook socio-economic differences and tend to overgeneralize their findings.

Likewise, one may consider a sample from the National University of Singapore as a “Chinese” sample because the National University of Singapore (NUS) has a student body of 90% Chinese. Therefore, if one samples from the NUS student body, one will be highly likely to obtain a sample of Chinese people. However, Singaporeans are mostly multilingual and multicultural in their backgrounds. They are Chinese with a Chinese culture, but this culture is different in certain ways from the culture of the Chinese in China proper. Their culture, though Chinese in its core, has been modified to include practices and beliefs reflecting their colonial and immigrant experiences and their mostly English education. Among the Chinese in Singapore, there are varying degrees of Chineseness. It is important that we identify the Chineseness in their cultural make-up and tap that part of their background while acknowledging the influences of other aspects as well.

Wrong Place Two: The Universalistic Approach and the Deviance Model

Both similarities and differences between Chinese and non-Chinese have been reported in psychological studies. When similarities are found between the Chinese and their non-Chinese counterparts, usually Westerners, the interpretation, of course, is that the Chinese are “human beings” too. But when differences are found, how do we interpret these differences? To begin with, there is often a political decision as to whether these differences mean deviance. If the Chinese participants are deviant or abnormal, then on whose terms or norms are these differences evaluated? If the differences repeat themselves in different studies, such systematic differences can be construed as differences between populations. Can differences between populations be considered deviant? To consider a behavior deviant implies not only a decision or “diagnosis” made against a
norm; it also implies maladaptiveness, not as good or as healthy, in psychological terms. Can we say that an entire population is unhealthy in some ways?

Furthermore, if we painstakingly evaluate the accumulated findings of psychological studies of the Chinese, we will find that the findings of similarities and findings of differences are not contradictory to each other. Why?

The studies where similarities are found are also studies where the aim is to identify processes, which are presumably less affected by the culture. The target of investigation is either neuro-biological studies or non-verbal operations.

Earlier we mentioned that being Chinese is a cultural definition. When the cultural factors are reduced to a minimum, are the Chinese still Chinese? Are behaviors observed in a “cultural vacuum,” devoid of the Chinese culture, still part of Chinese psychology? This is a tricky question. I think we can identify principles or processes that are fundamental and basic and perhaps have universal applications, such as the principles of classical and operant conditioning. These principles can be used to predict behaviors to some extent; but can we predict the behaviors of the Chinese? Without knowing the history of learning of the Chinese, it would be hard for us to predict how the Chinese might behave in a given situation. The collective history of learning is that which we call culture. There is no doubt that basic, fundamental and abstract principles of psychology are enormously useful. However, the utility value and the explanatory power of these principles are limited when we ask the question of how a particular group of people behave in their normal everyday life. To understand and to predict how people of the Chinese culture behave, we have to look into the culture of the Chinese.

Wrong Place Three: The Dependent/Behavioral Variable Approach

Another salient pattern in the study of the Chinese is to focus on the response, the R side of the S-R relationship. Psychologists seem to be preoccupied with identifying how people of different cultures behave, i.e. the Americans do this, the Germans do that, and the Chinese exhibit yet a third pattern of responses. For a cross-cultural comparison, the same independent variables and the same experimental conditions are employed. More importantly, the same measurements are used. The latter is the most problematic. Using the same measuring instruments for participants of different cultures, all we can say about the results is that peoples of different cultures respond to this scale in the same or different ways. Using the same experimental conditions, we can only infer from the results that, under this particular condition, people of different cultures behave this way or that. The knowledge we obtain from this approach is limited indeed. By knowing that Chinese behave the same as or differently from another group in a contrived, laboratory situation, we cannot gain any more understanding of how Chinese might behave in their normal everyday life. The information obtained in the laboratory situation is useless if it is not complemented by cultural information serving as the framework of interpretation.

Wrong Place Four: A Priori Assumption of Cultural Causes of Behaviors

If the Chinese behave differently, well, that is because they are Chinese. They have a different culture. But what is the culture of the Chinese that is different from that of the United States or Britain or Germany? What about the Chinese culture makes them behave differently under these conditions? These questions are left unanswered. The limitations of such approaches have been noted by Betancourt and Lopez (1993) in an eloquent essay that appeared in American Psychologist.

Not only do we need to know the culture of the Chinese in order to make sense of the data collected from the Chinese, but we also need an analysis of the culture. A culture is a complex mosaic. Some aspects of a culture may have nothing to do with the behavior being studied; some aspects of the culture may not be different from certain elements in other cultures. To summarize, to dismiss differences in behavior as a reflection of global cultural differences does not help us gain any more understanding of the Chinese, or of psychology (see Gardner, 1984 for a more detailed discussion on relationship between culture and behavior).

Wrong Place Five: Standardized Independent Variables

When Chinese are studied under the same conditions as their non-Chinese comparison groups, presumably they are responding to the same “independent variables.” But, as mentioned earlier, the same stimulus is not always perceived the same way, nor does it necessarily have the same behavioral implications for people of different past experiences, or
cultures. Even if we look at basic stimuli such as colors, studies of color perception and classification have amply illustrated how culture can affect our sensitivity and classifications of things so simple and basic (Rosch, 1977). For people of different cultures, the same colors can evoke different affective reactions. In other words, the same stimulus is interpreted through different frameworks of meanings. The same stimulus may have different levels of significance and may signal different behaviors to people of different cultures. What is at stake here is the conceptual and functional equivalence of the stimulus materials used in psychological studies (Lonner, 1980).

How do we achieve conceptual or functional equivalence of the stimuli so that participants of different cultural backgrounds are actually reacting to different, but equivalent, independent variables? The answer is not in the training of modern psychology, but in the extensive training of a cultural anthropologist or by being socialized into the culture as a native informant — the cultural insider.

**Wrong Place Six: Illusory Correlations Between Cultural Dimensions and Behaviors**

Sometimes, conscientious psychologists will measure a cultural dimension, such as the famous dimension of cultural collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), and attempt to identify the relationship between the cultural dimension and the behavior in question. When a significant correlation is obtained, the psychologist declares a causal relationship between the cultural dimension and the behavior — for example, if Chinese people are found to place less overt emphasis on sexual attraction in mate selection is this because they are “collectivist”? It seems to be a popular practice that whenever a new cultural dimension is published, many cross-cultural studies are done to test the relationship between the dimension and some behavioral variables. We seem to have forgotten that correlation is not causality, a lesson taught in first year psychology. A cultural dimension may represent a facet or a cluster of cultural variables that may either independently, or in combination, influence the behavior in question. Behind every statistically significant correlation coefficient, there lies the possibility of a multitude of different kinds of cause and effect relationships.

One might ask whether, logically, this cultural dimension has a causal impact on the behavior. Does it have a direct effect or does it influence the behavior in an indirect way, mediated by other variables? Or, as another possibility, does the cultural variable intervene with an existing relationship between a different cultural variable and the said behavior? Does the cultural variable moderate a relationship between two psychological variables? A consistent and repeated correlation is attractive in hinting at the possibility of a potential causal relationship. However, the correlations are often illusive and a causal conclusion would be misleading in the same way as it would with respect to the correlation between skin color and violent crime in the United States.

We step into the trap of cultural illusive correlation when we deal with culture at a macro level. Findings of correlation between macro variables can provide us with pointers for finer research. Finer analysis of both behavioral and cultural dimensions can then be designed on the basis of correlated macro variables. These studies can then be used to identify specific causal relationships. Instead of simple correlation and regression analyses, more sophisticated modeling methods backed by sound theoretical arguments and substantive understanding of the culture are needed.

**Where Is the Psychology of the Chinese?**

A Chinese is a person who subscribes to the Chinese culture — a person who lives or has lived his life by the set of beliefs, values and scripts of the Chinese. The psychology of the Chinese is the behaviors and underlying mechanisms of the persons who carry this culture. The psychology of the Chinese is the mechanisms and principles underlying Chinese behaviors that are informed and conditioned by Chinese culture. The study of Chinese psychology is not the investigation of Chinese behaviors in reference to or in comparison with the non-Chinese. In other words, strictly speaking, if our aim is to understand what makes the Chinese tick, it is within the Chinese where the answers lie. The beliefs and the reinforcement contingencies, real and symbolic, of the Chinese cultural environment guide the manifestations of the psychological processes of a person identified as Chinese. Findings about the behaviors of the Chinese can only be interpreted within the meaning framework of the Chinese in order to be valid.

So where do we search for the Chinese? The Chinese is found in the normal everyday Chinese existence, within the context of the Chinese culture, in the people who choose to live the Chinese way and with the people who live by the rules and principles of the collective cultural representations of the Chinese.
Being Chinese is not in one’s racial or genetic make-up; being Chinese is in the experience of being socialized as Chinese. Being Chinese is in the induction into the Chinese way of life. In the following, I will try to list the places that I think might be right places to look for the Chinese.

**Right Place One: Self-Identified Chinese**

If we accept the premise that the Chinese is defined by his or her culture, then we should not look for the Chinese by using demographic designation as an indicator of being Chinese. Being Chinese means identifying with the culture of the Chinese. Triandis (1972) makes a distinction between the public culture and the subjective culture. The culture that I understand as public culture, the values, role expectations, beliefs, and so on, written and taught as public information is a source of the subjective culture, but not necessarily the same as the subjective culture. Individuals within a community, any community, selectively subscribe to certain aspects of the culture, but not to other aspects of the culture. Similarly, individuals within a community may be enculturated to the same culture, but to different degrees. I think it is the subjective culture, the culture that is internalized by the individual, that is of relevance to the person’s behavior. The internalized subjective culture of the Chinese is what makes the person Chinese. So when we attempt to answer the question of how to identify the Chinese, the answer lies in the self-identification of the person. A person who self-identifies as an ethnic Chinese might have internalized more of the Chinese culture than someone who is merely designated as Chinese by demographic convenience.

**Right Place Two: Chinese Culture of the Common People**

Where is culture? What is the culture of the Chinese? I think that culture, or at least the culture that is relevant to psychological inquiry, is in the normal everyday life of the common people. Culture, the part of the culture that influences the behavior of an average Chinese, is not the classical scripts attributable to Confucius or other learned scholars, but the roles, beliefs, values, and other shared institutions and practices lived by average people in normal everyday life. Therefore, we should look for Chinese culture in the everyday life of common Chinese people. We should look for the values, beliefs, and expectations shared by the average Chinese. King (1992) used the term “vernacular Confucianism” to describe the culture practiced by the Chinese in modern day Hong Kong to distinguish the Confucianism practiced by the average people from the academic study of classical Confucianism. It is this folk form of Confucianism that I consider more relevant in shaping and guiding the normal everyday behavior of the Chinese. It is this form of vernacular Confucianism that provides the meaning for everyday Chinese behaviors.

**Right Place Three: The Daily Life of the Chinese**

As good psychologists, we tend to use so-called “standard procedures” in data collection. These standard procedures often employ two venues for data collection: the laboratory and the classroom. Psychology, as a scientific enterprise, is a recently imported academic discipline to the Chinese. It is often taught and studied only in selected institutions of higher learning, where the classroom and the laboratory are located. When employing such standard venues for psychological observation, one might gain insight about behavior within this particular context. The question one might ask is whether laboratory findings are generalizable to the life of the Chinese outside of the laboratory. Psychologists who study Asian psychology seem to agree on the observation of a relatively higher sensitivity to situations in Asian participants (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). If the Chinese are more susceptible to the influence of the situation, then the “demand characteristics” of the laboratory would have a higher impact on Chinese participants. If this is the case, then laboratory-obtained results would be less generalizable to the normal everyday life of the Chinese. If a phenomenon can only be observed in the classroom or the laboratory in Chinese universities, is the phenomenon still a part of the psychology of the Chinese?

Many findings in contemporary (Western) psychology began as observations in daily life. For instance, the classic study by Milgram (1963), on obedience and aggression, was inspired by real life situations during World War II, where ordinary people (conscripted soldiers) would inflict violent harm on others when ordered to do so by authority figures. In contemporary psychology, the laboratory does not have a life of its own. The procedures and techniques designed for and employed in the laboratory are simulations of situations found in normal everyday life. When we study the psychology of the Chinese, perhaps we should start from naturalistic observations of the Chinese in normal everyday life. Experimental manipulations can then be designed and used for better-controlled laboratory studies.
Right Place Four: Culturally Defined Psychological Constructs

There is now great interest in studying the same psychological process across different cultures. Nonetheless, there is a question that continues to haunt this endeavor: When we study a psychological process across different cultures, can we be sure that we are studying the same process, albeit in different cultures? More problematic is the labeling of the process — is love still love when the term is translated into different languages? Love assumes different manifestations and comes to be associated with different affective and symbolic meanings in different cultures. Finally, different kinds of love are arranged in different priorities for fulfillment and have different values in different societies. When we look at these different constructs of what love means in different cultures (see Hatfield & Rapson, 1993), are we still looking at the same process?

These questions are of central concern to cultural psychologists. Anthropologist Geertz (1975) advised that the meaning of a behavior and a concept could only be understood through the “interpretive” or “framework of meaning” of the natives. This view often has been interpreted as implying that only natives can interpret the meaning of a behavior. I do not always agree with this interpretation because it assumes that (1) all natives know the framework of meaning; and (2) none of the non-natives know the framework of meaning. Neither assumption is valid. I think it is competence in cultural knowledge that is crucial in this context, rather than the ethnic identity of the investigator. It is more likely that, as a native, one may be more privileged to have an intimate understanding of the culture. But an astute observer, such as a competent cultural anthropologist, can also attain a thorough understanding of the native culture. At any rate, the definition of, and, more importantly, the operationalization of, a psychological construct has to be contextualized via the cultural meaning system of a particular community.

Right Place Five: Culturally Based Measurement

Following the above-mentioned advice by Geertz, if we can assume that a psychological process exists across different cultures, the operationalization of the construct has to be conducted via the cultural context of the participants. In studying the Chinese, language has usually been used as the most important cultural variable involved in the measurement of most psychological constructs. Most researchers use instruments phrased in the native language of the participants. However, if we really adhere to the spirit of Geertz’s advice, then we would realize that it is not only the language that presents an obstacle in assessing psychological constructs of the Chinese. More importantly, it is the content of the instruments that might be misleading. In other words, the content and the construct validity are often in question.

As empirical scientists, psychologists look for observable indications of the underlying construct, presumably reflecting an underlying process. Do the same behavioral manifestations indicate the same basic process? Conversely, is it possible for different behavioral manifestations to reflect the same underlying process? We should carefully test instruments to assess construct validity before employing them. If possible, we should develop our own instruments specifically for the study of Chinese. To construct such instruments, however, we must have a thorough understanding of the culture in identifying the meaning of a psychological construct and its specific manifestations within the Chinese cultural context.

Right Place Six: Integrated Methodological Approach

The above mentioned issues seem to point to an integrated approach in studying the psychology of the Chinese, an approach which calls for an intimate understanding of the subject matter, the Chinese, as the starting point. I propose that we adopt the cultural sensitivity of the anthropologist and the scientific rigor of the psychologist in our search for the Chinese.

The early German tradition of folk psychology seems to come close to studying psychology in its cultural and historical context. Recently, there has been a revival of folk psychology in various forms. One example is that of cultural psychology, as advocated by Shweder (1990). This approach aims at providing a contextualization of experience in which psychological inquiry can be carried out. Typically, research in this tradition employs ethnographic studies to provide a context. Within this context, psychological concepts are constructed. Empirical observations are then interpreted. Utilization of this type of approach, an integration of both anthropological and psychological methods, in my view, can generate information that is more valid for the participants. This validity can give us more confidence in predicting and managing the behaviors of the people, the final goal of psychological studies.
In closing, I propose the following multi-stage process in searching for the Chinese. First, an intensive cultural study to familiarize one's self with the cultural context of the Chinese is needed. This should then be followed by construction of psychological constructs, forming causal hypotheses that delineate specific relationships between the constructs and relevant cultural variables. Finally, the last stage in this process, is to test the hypothesis with "traditional" psychological methods. In this regard, I am not proposing anything that is radically different from the research methodology commonly used by any competent psychologist. I am only proposing that we give the Chinese a chance, give the culture of the Chinese a chance. In other words, I am suggesting that we look for the Chinese by looking at where and what they are.

Notes
1 See also Huntington's book *The clash of civilizations and the making of new world order* for a discussion of ethnic grouping and the making of different ethnic and interest groups in the contemporary world.
2 Wundt showed an active interest in studying behaviors within the context of culture as evidence in the 10 volumes *Volkpsychologie* (1900–1920).

References

In Search of the Chinese in All the Wrong Places
在不恰当的地方探索中国人

居维宁
新加坡国立大学

摘要

本文讨论有关研究中国人心理在理论及验证上的一些问题。文中指出研究中国人心理时，我们首先要正确地界定何谓「中国人」。以居住的地域、所说的语言、或宗教的教条等作为认定标准是不恰当的。以个人的「文化驱动力」来认定「中国人」的身份也许是一个较恰当的方法。另外，跨文化心理研究往往认定两个种族之间的行为差异主要反映了文化因素是一种有争议的看法。因为各种行为上的差异并不是由文化的差异而导致的，可能还有许多特定情况因素的影响。文中最后指出在研究中国文化怎样影响中国人心理时，「普及」文化（即一般普罗大众的观念及价值观）比起传统儒家文化可能是更合适的研究目标。