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July 2025 Spotlight – Jessie Bee Kim Koh

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This month, we are pleased to introduce Dr. Jessie Bee Kim Koh, formerly an Assistant Professor of Applied Psychology, School of Humanities and Social Science, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen. She is currently taking an academic hiatus.

Can you write a couple sentences on some aspect of your career development?

When I was an undergraduate majoring in psychology, oftentimes, there were moments where I felt that the psychological phenomena and theories that I was reading "seemed to make sense, but not quite completely make sense" to me. It was only until I took a class in advanced social psychology, where the professor always spoke about cultural differences, that I understood why I felt the way I felt. That is, the psychological phenomena and theories that I was reading might not have fully captured or reflected the psychology of the Asians. From that point on, I was very much intrigued by cultural psychology and the study of the Asians. I took the advanced social psychology class in the last year of my undergraduate studies. Back then, I thought

to myself: I had just found out about cultural psychology and the study of the Asians and I was not ready to leave them until I learned more about them. Hence, when the professor who taught the advanced social psychology class asked me if I would like to do my Masters with her, I gladly said yes with great excitement. I had tons of fun exploring and studying the topics of self and well-being in the Asian context during the time when I was doing my Masters. The fascination with the topics I chose to study continued into the times when I was doing my PhD and when I was an assistant professor. In fact, the fun and fascination continue till today.

Dr. Weining Chang was the professor who taught the advanced social psychology class and my Masters mentor. Dr. Qi Wang was my PhD mentor. Both of them led the way and provided guidance as I explored the worlds of cultural and developmental psychology. I am very much thankful to them for shaping my career as a cultural developmentalist.

A short paragraph describing a particular recent finding, current study, or recent publication and what makes you excited about it.

More recently, I have been studying the effects of cultural change on developmental and psychological processes, particularly in the context of urban China. Urban China has experienced drastic socio-economic changes in the past 4 to 5 decades, especially in the first-tier cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Such a dynamic macro-context may change the ways in which the self develops and adapts across different generations of Chinese. For the parent generation, who grew up before and/or during the early years of the socio-economic reform, they may show a (traditional) Chinese self that is relational, which may be adaptive. For the emerging adult generation, who grew up after the socio-economic reform, they may show a (changed) Chinese self that is autonomous-relational and emotionally expressive, which may be adaptive. I conducted a study with my students to test these hypotheses. We recruited Chinese parents and their emerging adult children from Shenzhen and Guangzhou. We interviewed the participants for their life stories and assessed their well-being. For the parent generation, they scored higher on relatedness than autonomy, suggesting that they showed a relational self. Furthermore, references to autonomy in their life stories were negatively related to environmental mastery, personal growth and purpose in life. For the emerging adult generation, there was no difference between autonomy and relatedness, suggesting that they showed an autonomous-relational self. Moreover, they scored higher on expression of negative emotions than the parent generation. References to autonomy in their life stories were negatively related to purpose in life only, and references to negative emotions were positively related to positive relations with others. This study shows that understanding of the culturally adaptive self needs to take the dynamic nature of culture into consideration.

Your reflections on your interactions with the Asian Caucus would be highly appreciated.

Asian Caucus is a place where I get to meet and make connections with like-minded and supportive colleagues. The activities organized by the Caucus during SRCD meeting, such as round table discussion and international scholar meeting, are valuable to the Caucus community. I am very glad to be a part of this community!

A weblink you prefer to share?

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jessie-Koh-2