

## When Culture Meets Psyche: Understanding the Contextualized Self through the Life and Dreams of an Elderly Taiwanese Woman\*

Heidi Fung

*Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*

---

Through examining the possible meaning of the private, subjective, and idiosyncratic experiences of an individual—a sequence of dreams that an elderly Taiwanese lady has had, this study asks where culture is and how we should place the self in relation to culture. A-ma, the grandmother of one focal child in my previous works on socialization practices with young children at home, unexpectedly shared her life and particularly her dreams about her two deceased husbands with me after having known me for two years. Her first husband, with whom she only had a six-year marital life, appeared to her in a dream 13 years after his death when she had just remarried and moved the family for the sake of their children's schooling. He later revisited her on the very first night whenever and wherever she just moved to a new place, even 45 years after his death. This simple yet compelling dream seemed to have a profound consequence—she refused to have a sexual relationship with her second husband in their 24-year martial life. During my follow-up interviews with her in the past decade, the deeper I entered her inner world, the more I appreciate the inseparability of the self and culture. While the individual's meaning making process inevitably involves intensive dialogues between the self and the powerful cultural models instantiated in concrete life experiences, theories of culture must also account for human agency that actively and selectively make use of cultural resources as well as constraints. Such a dynamic nature is at once subjective and objective, personal and collective.

**Keywords:** culture and the self, dreams, life history, Taiwanese women, widowhood

---

---

\* This research was supported by research grants from the National Science Council, Executive Yuan, Taiwan Government (NSC89-2413-H-001-004 and NSC91-2413-H-001-005). My deepest gratitude goes to A-ma, who generously and trustfully allowed me to enter into

## Introduction

As a cultural psychologist in the field of human development, what interests me most is, with the resources as well as constraints of a given culture, how and why people think, feel, understand, value, desire, prefer, appreciate, and choose (and do not choose) to be the way they are in the process of constructing the meaning and identity of the person they come to be over their life span. Unlike most of my anthropological colleagues who study customary institutions and social structures in a relatively remote and isolated group or an enclosed community, the phenomena which attract me often seem to be not only too close to home, but also too personal and subjective to the observed individuals. I therefore almost always have to face the challenge of identifying what and where culture is. Is culture something “out there” which determines one’s internal psychological processes? Where should we place culture in the understanding of the self? How can we, methodologically as well as theoretically, derive the shared cultural value systems from the idiosyncratic psyche and independent spirit? Can we achieve that without sacrificing substantial individual agency? When searching for the contextualized meaning of thoughts and behaviors, shall we or can we separate the collective from the individual, the objective from the subjective? These questions certainly have to do with fundamental issues regarding how we define culture, the self, and the nature of the relationship between the two.

The importance of culture in social sciences was advocated as early as Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s thorough review in 1952. Nevertheless, due to the prominence of a “hard” natural sciences paradigm in mainstream psychology, until recently culture has remained marginalized or overlooked. This is perhaps because “taking culture seriously seems to announce the end of a generalizing science of the person and threatens a deep slide into the endless diversity of the species” (Shore 1998:3). In psychology, the earliest inclusion of culture probably came from the field of social psychology when cross-cultural psychology was born. Sharing the same epistemological stance as other mainstream psychologists, cross-cultural psychologists do not concern themselves much with the makeup of culture, nor about how cultural members actually live and experience their lives. Rather, culture is often seen as an independent or intermediate variable that determines or impacts the individuals’ thoughts

---

her life. I also wish to thank Peggy Miller, Richard Shweder, Naomi Quinn and Robert LeVine for their enduring encouragement, and my colleague, Liu Fei-wen, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

and behaviors, or as a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle for testing the generalizability or universality of presumptively context-free panhuman theories. For most cross-cultural psychologists, the analogy for doing comparative studies is to “peel the onion” (Poortinga et al. 1987; Segall et al. 1998)—taking off layers of culture and removing the overemphasized differences until the less visible universal psyche appears.

More recently, due to flourishing tourism and population mobility, dissemination of popular culture, rapid expansion of the Internet community, and the establishment of global institutions and multinational corporations, exposure to and contact with multiple cultures have become an inevitable part of social reality in almost every society. Pragmatic issues arising from directly encountering or (mis-)understanding each other have alerted psychologists in various fields to be much more sensitive and sophisticated in dealing with diversities within as well as across cultures (Hermans and Kempen 1998; Voestermans 1997; Shweder 2000, 2001a). Those who adopt a cultural psychological or an indigenous psychological perspective tend to be more open-minded towards a “soft” human sciences paradigm and less likely to apply theories and measures cross-culturally without taking specific cultural contexts into account. They, instead, make efforts to understand the native’s point of view by investigating their indigenous concepts and folk theories. Numerous important works, discussions and debates have taken place in the past decade, including those at a conference convened by Professor Yang Kuo-shu and hosted by the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, in 1999. Resuming the “cultural revolution” (Yang 2000) in psychology, the central mission of the conference was to extensively compare the three main psychological approaches to culture: cross-cultural, cultural psychology, and indigenous, with respect given to their epistemological, conceptual, and methodological stances.<sup>1</sup> While the cross-cultural camp claims that “cross-cultural psychology is a symbiosis of the group anthropological, the individual psychological, and the inter-individual cultural psychological domains” (Berry 2000:201), the indigenous camp proposes a unification of the three approaches under the umbrella of indigenous psychology (Yang 2000), and the cultural psychological camp sees itself as much more sympathetic to indigenous than to cross-cultural psychology (Shweder 2000).

Although not much consolidation seems to have been accomplished, there is little doubt that the three perspectives unanimously agree that it is impor-

---

<sup>1</sup> The six keynote speeches at this third meeting of the Asian Association of Social Psychology were later published as a special issue in the Association’s official journal (Hwang and Yang 2000).

tant and necessary to incorporate culture into psychological studies. As a consequence, psychologists redefine the self by broadening the scope of its definition to encompass both a conceptual and a cultural view (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Markus et al. 1996, 1997). The former sees the individual as an objectified and self-contained entity with a set of internally fixed and constant attributes or traits. In contrast, the latter treats the self as the subject of experience in relation to others, which is inseparable from its interpersonal contingencies, social and situational surroundings, and cultural and historical traditions. To understand the cultural self, psychologists are advised to: (1) integrate the cultural and the individual level—both cultural and individual changes should be treated as co-constructions with the same theoretical framework; (2) incorporate both individual and collective meaning systems, as well as their development and interrelationship; and (3) bridge the gap between objectivism and subjectivism—subjective meaning for individuals is just as important as objective cultural and historical conditions (Eckensberger 1990:42).

While psychologists have come a long way in appreciating the importance of culture and in accepting diversities as social reality, there have been regrets among anthropologists for missing out on the “cognitive revolution” in the late 20th century and hence they are inclined to scrutinize the cognitive properties of cultural models (Shore 1996; Holland and Quinn 1987; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Although cultural psychology and psychological anthropology seem to have gone their separate ways, what they do see eye-to-eye is the mutually constituted nature of cultural representations and individual experiences. When taking human agency into serious account, cognitive or psychological anthropologists also strive for a new conception of culture. There are suggestions that culture should be perceived as both symbolic (as the artifacts, categories, beliefs and doctrines that organize, rationalize and justify a way of life) and behavioral (as patterns of observable behavior and “custom complex” that are learned and passed on from one generation to the next) (LeVine 1984; Shweder 1991, 2001b). To put it differently, culture is both an “external” institution as “culture-in-the-world” and an “internal” institution as “culture-in-the-mind” (Shore 1996:5). Treating culture as one dimension of the constructive mind (Hollan 2000), the new theories of culture hence lean toward the lived experience of active and purposive individuals (Mathews and Moore 2001), intersubjectively shared cognitive schemas arising out of shared experience (D’Andrade 1990; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Quinn 2003), products of meaning making (Shore 1996; Josephs 2002), or discursive practices (Miller and Goodnow 1995; Holland et al. 1998; Ochs and Capps 2001). Methodologically, person-centered ethnography (LeVine 1982; Hollan 2000,

2001) has been advocated in order to generate “experience-near” (Geertz 1984) categories and constructs.

In the following pages I will demonstrate what I have learned from examining the possible meaning of idiosyncratic, subjective and private experiences of one individual—the dreams of an elderly Taiwanese lady whom I have known for more than a decade. Although dreaming is a universal human phenomenon, dream experiences can be extremely personal and extraordinary to the particular individual, and hard to empirically test for their generalizability and validity. In the process of identifying what this lady’s dreams might mean, I came to realize the complexity and perplexity of the contextualized self. The deeper I enter her inner world—her motive and psyche, choice and preference, love and hate—the more I appreciate the inseparability of the self and culture, and the less I am willing to pinpoint any particular cultural ideology and symbol or affective state as the specific corresponding reflection of her dreams, as if culture were separate from the person. I will emphasize intrinsic dynamism and fluidity when situating the autonomous and creative self in the equally multifaceted cultural context. Spatially, the internalized cultural models can be competing or in conflict with each other. Temporally, the treatment of life experiences or events has to be placed along a temporal continuum that cannot be narrowly confined to the existing tangible world.

## A-ma and Her Dreams

### *The Interviews*

I knew A-ma (阿嬤; Taiwanese dialect for addressing an elderly lady, particularly a grandmother)<sup>2</sup> through my previous works on early socialization of shame among young children in Taiwanese families (Fung 1994, 1999; Fung and Chen 2001, 2002). In that ethnographic study, I participated in and observed preschool-aged children’s daily lives and their interactions with family members over a period of two years in the late 1980s. Over time, my original role as a researcher had become that of a family friend who was often invited to informal family gatherings and outings, and I shared the sadness of family losses or misfortune as well as the joys of children’s growth or the arrival of a new life. A-ma is the maternal grandmother of one of the focal children, who stayed with the family during most weekdays in order to take care of her grandchildren while their parents were working. Towards the end of the two-year observational phase in late 1990, when I was about to conduct an inter-

---

<sup>2</sup> To be consistent, romanization throughout this paper follows the pronunciation in Mandarin.

view with each child's primary caregiver on child-rearing beliefs and practices, A-ma was in mourning for the loss of her second husband. Her daughter, therefore, suggested that I took her to a restaurant and interview her there as a way to cheer her up, which I did. However, instead of answering my questions, she steered the interview in her own direction, telling me stories of her life. I finally gave in and simply let her lead. What stood out the most in that interview was a series of dreams she had had. A-ma rarely conveyed much explicitly (particularly on sensitive issues like sexuality),<sup>3</sup> never marked any of her emotions with a descriptor or label, and often used incomplete sentences, broken fragments and silences. Nevertheless, the telling of her dreams was highly emotionally charged, and sometimes so overwhelmed me that I could only respond with sighs or long pauses. Somehow, this "unsuccessful" but compelling interview kept haunting me. After the first interview, which lasted for 2.75 hours, I went back to interview her three more times over a span of ten years (in 1991, 1999 and 2000, which lasted for 2, 3, and 3.75 hours on tape, respectively). Each time, I basically invited her to talk about her own life history without much guidance. In time, she seemed to reveal herself more freely,<sup>4</sup> even in the presence of her son during the third interview.<sup>5</sup> In the fourth interview, she confessed for the first time in a decade some facts that were astonishing to me but perhaps unimportant to her.

### *A-ma's Life*

A-ma, a devout Christian now in her early 70s,<sup>6</sup> was born in a fishing village in southern Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. She lost her loving mother at age 10, and was forced to work and support the family after receiving six years of education in Japanese. She married and was widowed twice in

<sup>3</sup> For instance, when talking about sex (or the lack of sex) with her second husband, without uttering the word, she only implied it by saying, "[Since] we both are women anyway, even, even, even if I [don't] say it, there will be no, no difficulty for you to understand."

<sup>4</sup> There might be a number of reasons why she became more forthcoming. In addition to the growing rapport between us, other possible reasons might include her self-healing over time, and her desire to offer indirect suggestions to young people after witnessing her children's marriages.

<sup>5</sup> That morning when I arrived and found out that A-ma's youngest son, a university professor, stayed at home that day, I had doubts about how revealing she would be and whether I should reschedule the interview. When I was conducting the interview with A-ma at the dining table, her son, who was sitting in the living room, could overhear us and sometimes intervened with questions (mainly regarding historical details or relationships among the older generation). When I resumed recording after a three-hour lunch and dessert break, he made a comment, "Even with my presence, my mom is still quite candid to you."

<sup>6</sup> A-ma was introduced to Christianity at school age through a girl friend whose father was a missionary and was baptized after her first marriage. She is a regular churchgoer and devotes most of her free time to volunteer works in the church.

her life. She married her first husband, Lin, when she was 19 and he was 23, two years after the end of World War II when Taiwan was returned to the KMT government in China. Lin, a frail but talented orphan raised by his grandparents, grew up on the same street as A-ma and used the same well as her family. After graduating from a prestigious local high school, he could not go to Japan for further education due to strained family finances and so became a school teacher, a respectable but underpaid career. During their six-year marriage, in addition to caring for the children they quickly had, A-ma also had to attend to Lin's every need. Lin was career-minded, hardly shared any housework, and he easily and frequently fell ill. He passed away at 29, leaving her three young children to care for (a girl aged 4, and two sons aged 2.5 and 1.5) and little money. Although A-ma described this brief marriage as busy, tiring and worrying, there were also many romantic moments and fond memories. When she buried him, she said to him in Japanese, "All our children, count on me." With three demanding young children at home, she could not find outside jobs, but provided for their children by earning a living as a self-employed seamstress.

At age 38, after being widowed for 13 years, she remarried due to the heavy financial burden of paying for higher education for her eldest daughter, who was being admitted to a private college, as well as the two younger sons. A former student of Lin's observed her adversity and introduced Wang to her. Wang, then a 47-year old military officer, had left his family behind on the Mainland and fled to Taiwan with the KMT regime 17 years earlier. In order to settle his new family, he immediately retired from the army, with a pension and moved them to Taipei out of consideration for her children's schooling. Though not rich, he managed the family finances well and, unlike Lin, did all kinds of chores for her and her children. Two of the children later received doctoral degrees in Europe and are now university professors, while the oldest son, a college graduate, is an engineer. In A-ma's early 60s, Wang died, ending their 24-year marriage (please see Table 1 for a summary of A-ma's life, and Table 2 for a comparison of her two marriages).

### *A-ma's Dreams*

In all my interviews with A-ma, she consistently brought up one topic-dreams about her two husbands (see Table 3). Every time I saw her, she was always ready to share her dreams with me. Not only were the same dreams repeatedly narrated within the same interview session and across different sessions over time, there were also new ones to tell (except in the last interview). When she shared her dreams with me for the first time (I had known her for two years by then), she began with the series of the dreams (in the order of W-2,

W-1, W-4) she had around the time of Wang's death (Wang had just passed away at the time) and then moved on to the dreams (L-1, L-2) she had for thirty consecutive nights after Lin's death. In the dream (L-1), Lin talked to her and played with the children in their big bed as usual. Each night upon seeing him, A-ma woke up in a heavy sweat and realized it was always around 1:36 a.m., the time when Lin had drawn his last breath. On the thirtieth night (L-2), he came back to fetch his coloring kit for teaching and waved good-bye to her from a car.<sup>7</sup> The next time he appeared in her dreams was thirteen years later.

"And more, and there're even more mysterious things," she began with a dramatic tone, and slowing her rate of delivery, she went on to tell me her next dream of Lin, which occurred immediately after her remarriage. On the very first night, when she moved from southern Taiwan to Taipei and had the first opportunity to live with Wang as husband and wife, Lin appeared to her in a dream (L-4). Compared to the detailed descriptions of her earlier dreams (e.g., the fabric of the white garment Wang wore in the dream before he passed away), the content of this dream is simple yet riveting: He stood there in front of her bed, looking at her without saying a word. Subsequently, the Wang family moved several times in Taipei and to an adjacent city. Each time, on the very first night in the new home, Lin came to her in a dream (L-5 ~8, L-9), leaving her to sob her heart out. This simple recurring dream seemed to have a profound and lasting consequence—she refused to have a sexual relationship with her second husband, and deliberately found jobs far away from home, returning only during weekends or holidays. Such a tension was not released until Wang lost interest in sex in his later years.

When I saw her again the following year, she updated me concerning her latest dreams. About half a year prior to the interview and one year after the second husband's death, Lin came to her in a dream during her trip to Europe with her daughter and grandchildren, which was the first time she ever traveled abroad. This dream occurred one chilly night when A-ma was staying in the Alps (L-10). Lin, in heavy winter clothes, looked exhausted and dirty. A-ma thought, that while they flew there by plane, Lin must have made the long journey and climbed up the mountains on foot. Whenever she dreamed of Lin, she cried. This time, she cried most sadly. On the same trip, her second husband in fact also appeared in her dreams a few days earlier. Before going up to the Alps, while they were staying in a Swiss town (where the weather was warmer), Wang came to her in a short-sleeved shirt (W-5). This dream, how-

---

<sup>7</sup> Upon seeing Lin leaving, she weailed miserably until Lin's younger sister, who came to accompany her through the night, awoke her at the noise she made. A-ma told her sadly, "Your brother [truly] had gone."



**TABLE I.** A-ma's major life events.

Year/ Month	Age	Major Events in A-ma's Life	Major Events in Taiwan History
1895			Qing Dynasty; Taiwan was ceded to Japan as a Japanese colony
1911			Birth of Republic of China
1914~1918			World War I
1928/11	0	Born in a fishing village in southern Taiwan	
1934	6	Beginning elementary education (in Japanese)	
1937	9	Quitting school to take care of her sick mother	1937~1945 Sino-Japanese War
1938	10	Mother died (survived by her husband and two kids); school teacher persuaded her father to let her return to school	
1939		Being introduced to Christianity through a girl friend in school	World War II began
1940	12	Finishing elementary education; working as a graphic copier in the Taiwan Iron Company	
1941			Japan attacked the Pearl Harbor; China joined World War II
1945		Working as a bank teller in a local credit union	End of World War II; Japanese left Taiwan and KMT took over; severe inflation and financial crisis
1947/2			The 228 massacre by KMT soldiers
1947/6	19	Marrying Lin (age 23)	
1948	20	Oldest daughter born	
1949	21	Oldest son born	Chiang Kai-shek's KMT was defeated by Mao's communist party; retreated to Taiwan; continuing inflation; enforcing martial law
		Wang fled to Taiwan with the KMT troops	1951~1965 Generous foreign aid from the U.S. government
1951	23	Youngest son born	
1953/3	25	Lin passed away (age 29) (Dreams <b>L-1</b> and <b>L-2</b> )	
		Sewing clothes for others; becoming a baptized Christian	
1965			Developing first Economic Processing Zone to promote export industries; industrialization began
1966	38	Daughter admitted to college; Wang brought children to Taipei for schooling; left behind selling house and packing (Dream <b>L-3</b> ?)	
1966/10	38	Marrying Wang (age 47); moving to Taipei (Dream <b>L-4</b> )	
1967		Moving several times in Taipei (Dreams <b>L-5</b> ~ <b>8</b> ); starting her project on compiling a Japanese textbook for beginners	The start of 9-year mandatory education
1972		Having jobs outside Taipei (as dormitory superintendent at a factory and later a school)	Japan established ties with China and severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan
1975			Chiang Kai-shek died
1978			Chiang's son, Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded; U.S. established ties with China and severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan
1979~1980			"Formosa incident," the underground opposition party members were arrested and jailed
1980		Moving to an adjacent city (Dream <b>L-9</b> )	Developing first Science-Based Industrial Park; high tech industries began to boom
1986			Legalization of opposition parties; DPP was formally established
1987			Lifting Martial Law; civilians were allowed to travel to the Mainland for the first time after 40 years of restriction
1988	60	Oldest son got married (without inviting Wang to the wedding)	
		Lin's younger brothers came to congratulate her on her birthday	Chiang Ching-kuo died; Lee Teng-hui succeeded (first President by Taiwanese ethnicity)
1988~1990		Researcher conducted an observational study in her oldest daughter's home, where A-ma was the primary caregiver for her grandchildren during weekdays	
1990	62	Wang passed away (age 71) (Dreams <b>W-1</b> , <b>W-2</b> , <b>W-3</b> , <b>W-4</b> ); staying with the oldest daughter	Taiwan stock market collapsed
		<b>FIRST INTERVIEW</b>	
1991	63	First time traveling abroad to Switzerland in the summer with daughter and grandchildren (Dreams <b>W-5</b> , <b>L-10</b> )	
		<b>SECOND INTERVIEW</b>	
1994	66	Moving into the oldest son's home (Dream <b>L-11</b> )	DPP member, Chen Shui-bian, won Taipei mayoral election
1996			First presidential election and Lee Teng-hui won
1998	70	Moving into the youngest son's home (Dream <b>L-12</b> )	
1999	71	<b>THIRD INTERVIEW</b>	Lee Teng-hui declared a "state-to-state basis" between Taiwan and China
2000	72	<b>FOURTH INTERVIEW</b>	Second presidential election; Chen Shui-bian became the first DPP President

TABLE 2. A-ma's two marriages.

	Length of Marriage	Husband's Background	How Did They Meet and Marry?	Reason to Marry	Reason to End Marriage	Number of Children	Relationship in Marriage	Sexuality
First Husband Lin	6 years (age 19~25)	4 years senior; Taiwanese; school teacher	Love match; growing up in the same village	Love and admiration	When first husband died at age 29	3	Asymmetrical, submissive	Satisfying
Second Husband Wang	24 years (age 38~62)	9 years senior; Mainlander; KMT military officer; leaving his family behind and fleeing to Taiwan in 1949	Arranged marriage; introduced by Lin's former student	Financial burden; Wang helped to raise her children	When second husband died at age 71	0 (each has 3 from previous marriage)	Asymmetrical, dominant	Trying hard to avoid

TABLE 3. A-ma's dreams.

Before Death		Immediately after Death		Years after Death					
				13 yrs					
First Husband Lin				L-3	L-4	L-5~8	L-9	L-10	L-11
	(Lin himself saw an old man in all white)	L-1	L-2	Moving once in the South	First night after remarriage/moving up to Taipei	Moving four times in Taipei	Moving to an adjacent city	At the Alps	Moving to the oldest son's
		Being at home as usual for 30 nights (occurred at 1:36 a.m. each night)	On the 30th night, coming back to get color kit and say "good-bye"						son's
Reaction		Crying	Crying						
Time told	90,91,00	90,91,99,00	90,91,99,00	91,99	90,91,99	90,91,99	90,91,99	91,99	99,00
Second Husband Wang				1 yr					
				W-5	In a Swiss town (occurred a few days earlier than L-10)				
Reaction									
Time told	90,91,99	90,91,99,00	91	Calm					

Order of telling:

- 1990 — W-2, W-1, W-4, L-1, L-2, L-4, L-5~8, L-9  
1991 — L-10, L-1, L-2, (L-3), L-4, L-5~8, L-9, L-10, L-10, W-5, W-1, W-2, W-3, W-4, W-5, L-10  
1999 — L-11, L-12, L-11, L-12, L-10, W-4, L-1, L-2, L-1, L-5~8, (L-3), L-2, (L-3), L-5~8, L-11, L-12, L-11, L-12, W-1, W-2, W-4, W-5, L-10, L-11, L-12  
2000 — L-1, L-2, L-11, L-12, L-12, L-11, L-12, L-2, W-2, W-4

ever, was narrated much later than that of Lin and with much less emotional intensity.

In the third interview, which was conducted after an eight-year hiatus, A-ma eagerly reported her two latest dreams as soon as I arrived. Five years before the interview, on the very first night after she moved from her daughter's to her oldest son's home, Lin again came to her in a dream (L-11). This time, he did not come into her room, but called her from the outside. A-ma walked out to the balcony and saw him down on the street. He verbally acknowledged that she was in their son's home and then left. After living with her older son for four years, A-ma moved again to the youngest son's house, which was a year before the third interview. Again, on the very first night, Lin appeared in her dream (L-12). This time, he came into her bedroom as he usually did, walked around the new room in a circle and then left without saying a thing. Nevertheless, unlike before, A-ma was calm and did not cry in these two latest dreams of Lin.

Although A-ma seems to dream frequently, her dreams of her husbands never occurred randomly. As shown in Table 3, her dreams basically fall into two clusters, both of which are concerned with her physical departure or geographic relocation. The first cluster occurred immediately before or after the loss of each of her two husbands, whereas the other cluster occurred on the very first night whenever and wherever she moved and settled into a new place or traveled afar. Almost all the dreams in the second cluster have to do with the first husband, who came to her dreams 10 times over a span of 32 years, 13 to 45 years after his death. In contrast, it only happened once in the case of Wang, a year after he passed away. Even A-ma herself remarked on the regularity of her dreams, referring particularly to Lin's appearance. "[He (Lin)] won't, won't come to trouble you too often. No, he won't. Nor would he come any time at his own will. No. About this, he observes the rules (*hen shou guiju* 很守規矩)!" she said.

In addition, as shown in Table 3, not every dream carries equal weight. After briefly talking about a dream in which Wang was nude (W-3), it was completely dropped in later recounts.<sup>8</sup> The first telling of L-3, supposedly the first ever occurring dream in the second cluster, was so vague and inarticulate that I failed to single it out as an independent dream until much later in the study.<sup>9</sup> There was also a clear distinction in terms of the atmosphere in her

<sup>8</sup> Even with my prompts in the fourth interview, she could not recall a thing about it.

<sup>9</sup> In the third interview, when I asked her if the second cluster of dreams had anything to do with her remarriage, she mentioned dream L-3 as an objection, suggesting that those dreams had to do with moving instead. Dream L-3 should have occurred during the period while Wang had already brought the children to Taipei for schooling, and she was left

dreams. In contrast to her heartbreaking reactions toward Lin, she was always calm in her dreams of Wang. The one immediately after Wang's death (W-4) is particularly "pleasant." In it Wang was happily reading the Bible without falling asleep like he usually did when he was alive. A-ma explained that it meant he had already made it to Heaven. Furthermore, the order of the dreams in each of her spontaneous narrations seems to closely parallel the major change in her life at the time. Her recounts of the dreams of Lin always preceded those of Wang, with the exception of the first interview, which took place when Wang just passed away. In the third interview, extra weight was given to the two latest dreams (L-11 and L-12), which coincided with her recent moves into her sons' homes. With time, compared to Lin, Wang gradually faded out of her dream telling. Indeed, in the third interview, nine years after her second husband's death, she admitted that she could finally free herself from the psychological burden caused by remarrying and from the sexual tension between them, and consequently she felt much more at ease.

## Unfolding A-ma's Dreams

### *Affects as Context*

My first interpretation of A-ma's dreams was that they symbolized her shame in front of her first husband (Fung 1994). My rationales included: (1) it involved transgression of widowhood chastity on her part, a highly praised virtue under Confucian influence (Liu 2001). The long-lived unblemished image of her beloved mother exemplified such values. Since female doctors were hard to find back then and no man except her husband was allowed to touch or see her private parts, A-ma's mother refused to be treated for her gynaecological problems and hence died of prolonged abnormal uterine bleeding; (2) Lin, consciously or subconsciously, sat in self-invoked judgment of her transgression through her dreams; and (3) even though she probably had no intention of transgressing, she apparently accepted his judgment, which inhibited her from having an intimate relation with her second husband.

I was a sympathetic listener with rapport established over the years, while at the same time an outsider to her closest social circle, and this granted me unique access to A-ma's dreams and inner feelings. In the third interview, the only time A-ma's youngest son was present, he was very surprised and

---

behind to pack the family's belongings and sell her house. Hence, she temporarily moved into a friend's house for a short while, and had not had a chance to begin her remarried life yet. Nevertheless, she also admitted that she did not take that particular dream seriously at the time until the regularity of its recurrence became obvious to her.

excited to learn for the first time of his dad's visitation the previous year when his mother had just moved in (L-12). In an earlier interview, when asked whether she would share her dreams with her children, A-ma said, "I could only tell outsiders, to the outsider. Well, I, they did know that I had dreams [about their father], and I could only tell them this much . . . I told them I had dreams. This part, yeah. But the bitterness (苦痛 *kutong*) deep in my heart, I, I don't think I could ever talk about it to my own children."

Indeed, the more I entered her emotional worlds, the more I realized how complex and perplexing the meaning of these dreams could be, much more than I originally envisioned. In my fourth interview with A-ma, I was finally bold enough to ask her whether her dreams indicated any guilt or shame towards Lin. She answered, "He was full of tenderness (*han qing momo* 含情脈脈), didn't blame me at all. No, no, not at all, I felt nothing like that at all . . . I didn't feel ashamed (*wukuei* 無愧) either, and he also had no blame . . . . Wherever I go [or move to], he always follows close behind. It shouldn't be blame. If he were, were angry with me, he would have already left me."

After the third interview with A-ma, I also solicited opinions from other women. Forty Taiwanese women ranging from 21 to 65 years of age ( $M = 36.63$ ,  $SD = 11.79$ ) were recruited and individually interviewed in a semi-structured manner.<sup>10</sup> After having them listen to a 30-minute tape-recorded account of A-ma's life history, which was chronologically organized and narrated by me with direct quotes from A-ma, I asked them to explain A-ma's dreams for me. Despite their diverse personal opinions regarding A-ma's two marriages, these informants were able to immediately relate A-ma's life to themselves or women around them. As shown in Table 4, all of them took her dreams seriously as part of the reality in her life and associated these dreams with her affection for Lin.

Most interviewees identified a mixture of affective states. Among these answers, quite surprisingly, "Love" is the most frequently endorsed category (53.5 percent). Typical answers in this category include: "Because A-ma misses or loves him too much;" "She holds on to him and never wants to let him go;" "Lin wants to accompany her, checks up on her, or participates in her life;" and "Through dreams, they continue to see each other and their romance sustains and keeps growing." "Shame" (20.7 percent) emerges as the second

---

<sup>10</sup> What is being analyzed and reported here belongs to part of a project on women's relational worlds. A protocol of questions regarding their thoughts and opinions about A-ma's life and marriages were asked in a semi-structured manner. Interviewees also shared their own marital or relational lives with the researcher. Each interview (excluding listening to the recorded story about A-ma) lasted for 1.5 hours on average (ranging from 45 minutes to 3 hours on tape).

TABLE 4. Informants' interpretations of A-ma's dreams.

Code	Combination	Frequency (N=40*)	Frequency of Total Codes (n=58)
Love- Love, companionship	Love	14 (35.0%)	31 (53.5%)
	Love and shame	7 (17.5%)	
	Love and encouragement	5 (12.5%)	
	Love and other	5 (12.5%)	
Shame- Shame, guilt, betrayal	Shame	4 (10.0%)	12 (20.7%)
	Love and shame	[7]	
	Shame and encourage- ment	1 (2.5%)	
Encouragement- Encouragement, commendation, support	Encouragement	3 (7.5%)	9 (15.5%)
	Love and encouragement	[5]	
	Shame and encourage- ment	[1]	
Other**	Other	0 (0%)	5 (8.6%)
	Love and other	[5]	
No comment		1 (2.5%)	1 (1.7%)
TOTAL		40 (100%)	58 (100%)

\* No significant age effect among informants (range=21-65;  $\bar{M}$ =36.63;  $SD$ =11.79).

\*\*For instance, "A-ma has a strong sixth sense," or "dreams represent a responsible report to herself or to Lin," etc.

highest category. Typical answers include: "A-ma feels sorry, regretful, guilty or ashamed towards Lin;" "She believes that she has betrayed Lin; Lin comes to blame or shame her;" and "Through dreams, she keeps reminding herself that her husband is Lin instead of Wang." Interestingly, two interviewees reported that it was Lin who felt shameful or guilty towards A-ma (rather than the other way around) for abandoning her too early and forcing her to take on the burden of childrearing on her own. "Encouragement" (15.5 percent) ranks the third, and its typical explanations include: "A-ma needs Lin's support and encouragement;" "Lin appears to endorse or stand up for what she has done;" and "Through dreams, A-ma receives courage, security, and strength from Lin in order to go on with her life."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> One informant (#08) expressed that she did not know what to say, because, compared to female friends around her (including her two sisters), A-ma was very fortunate to have two nice men who both loved her and solved all her problems for her.

Thirteen of them (33 percent) reported the affective states as mutual, as if the relationship and communication between A-ma and Lin remained unchanged or was still evolving. Furthermore, eleven of them (27 percent) pointed out that these dreams served as a way for her to manage her life and regulate her emotions. For instance, Informant #15 said, "In her dreams, she could let her frustrations out. In her daily life, she had no choice but to act tough, particularly in front of her kids and her neighbors. Only through dreams was she able to vent emotions suppressed by herself." Likewise, Informant #24 believed, "These dreams meant a great deal to her, regardless of what sort of emotions were reflected in them, be it guilt towards her first husband or enduring love between the two of them. Or, perhaps she eased Lin's worries about her by letting him see her in her dreams. Yeah, what I meant is that the processing of all sorts of emotions inside her was actually accomplished in her dreams."

### *Marital Lives as Context*

Since A-ma's dreams were centered on her two husbands, her marital lives and relationships with the two men are certainly crucial to interpreting her dreams (Fung 2001). As shown earlier in Table 2, the two husbands came from different worlds with very different backgrounds. Nevertheless, both men loved A-ma dearly in their own ways. When she depicted how Wang had carefully washed her dentures and soaked them in water for her every night for years, she almost sobbed, "Whenever I think about this, I, I feel apologetic to him. . . . Maybe it's not apology; I don't know how to put it. But I truly deeply appreciate his genuine love (*zhenai* 真愛)." Because of his tender care and kind help, her deteriorating health (due to long sessions at the sewing machine and pushing the foot pedal each day for over a decade) and her financial situation greatly improved. He also tolerated her temper and her refusal to have intercourse. A-ma bashfully said he spoiled her like a little girl, and giving him a marriage only in name was truly unfair to him.

Nevertheless, Wang lacked Lin's "grace (*ya* 雅)." Lin read extensively, taught her Shakespeare, Yeats, and Chinese poems, led her to discuss nature, astronomy, and films with him, and satisfied her hunger for learning and knowledge. He was also more romantic and sentimental. For instance, one time when he was reading her the famous will written by a revolutionary martyr, Lin Jue-min (林覺民), to his wife in a failed uprising to overthrow the Qing Dynasty, he said to her, "I'd rather you die first." When A-ma stared at him with wide eyes, he explained, "Because I am too afraid that you won't be able to endure the pain of losing me." She never dared to throw temper tantrums with him as she did with Wang. Although, in her own words, she was



almost like a servant to her “Japanese-styled” husband in their six-year marriage, she felt it was all worthwhile. She often portrayed her relationships with the two men as resolving two mutual but crossing debts (*xiang qianzhai* 相欠債). While Wang owed her in his previous life, so that in this life he came to make amends, she owed her debt to Lin, and hence continues to pay it off to him through his children and grandchildren. When she first met Lin, she had already silently committed herself to taking care of him for the rest of her life. Likewise, when Wang saw her, at the first sight he was ready to undertake the responsibility of caring for her and her children.

Indeed, her children, or more accurately, Lin’s children, are the highest priority in her life. When she promised at his funeral to raise them to the best of her ability, she dramatically portrayed it as a sudden transformation from a weak woman to a full man. She always tried hard to satisfy her children’s every need, dressing them neatly, subscribing to children’s magazines and paying for all school activities so that they could participate. One time, the minister in her church admired her effort, saying that, “Teacher’s Wife (*xian-sheng niang* 先生娘), those kids with fathers cannot receive such good care as what your children have been receiving.”

When her oldest son did not allow Wang to attend his wedding (let alone to host it), it completely broke Wang’s heart and even made him cry. A-ma’s son said, “Being Lin’s eldest son, I’ll repay you in other forms, but there is no place for you on this occasion.”<sup>12</sup> Although A-ma mitigated and calmed Wang down, in her mind, she thought, “If they are put on a scale, my son would be more important, and he is not. To be honest, even if doing this offended him, I had to; even if I was wrong, I was.” Moreover, her children’s surname remained unchanged. If they adopted Wang’s surname, they would have been entitled to social welfare as children of a veteran. However, A-ma said, “I gritted my teeth (*yao zhe yagen* 咬著牙根) and still insisted they keep their last name.” On her sixtieth birthday, Lin’s younger brothers, who had never offered much help, came to congratulate her with money and gifts for the first time, because they finally realized how much their sister-in-law had contributed to the Lin family by raising three children who made them proud. In different contexts, A-ma remarked on their relationship in a Taiwanese slang, *yishiren* 一世人, meaning that once they had a relationship, be it husband and wife or members of the same family clan, they are meant to bond together for a lifetime, even if only spiritually.

---

<sup>12</sup> A-ma’s youngest son told me that his brother suffered the “eldest son complex” and always felt guilty about being unable to take care of his mother and younger siblings for the Lin family. Otherwise, his mother would not have needed to remarry.

She twice indirectly hinted at the satisfying sexual relationship she had with Lin. In the first interview, she described her immediate pregnancy after her wedding as *rumenxi* 入門喜—literally, joy after entering the door. When I looked puzzled, she proudly explained, “It means that as soon as you enter into the family, you got good news [of having a baby]. . . . The first month after I got married, my menstrual period didn’t come. People call this *rumenxi*. Just like that, so, like that, we got three kids in six years.” In the fourth interview, I asked her if sex is important in marital relationships. She gave me an affirmative yes and went on to criticize how wrong today’s young people are for only focusing their attention on skills, duration, and orgasm. She went on almost breathlessly, “What a mistake! The true sweetness (*tianmei* 甜美) is, really, even with no intercourse, when he leans towards you, you’ve already melted. You’ve already [melted]. Experiencing that once would already leave enough for you to cherish for the entire life, let alone having a couple of years like this together, right?”

In the fourth interview, A-ma finally revealed to me for the first time in twelve years that she aborted Wang’s child twice—in other words, they did have a sexual relationship! Although he would very much love to have “a child from her womb,” as A-ma put it, she insisted on aborting it each time.<sup>13</sup> She acknowledged Wang’s understanding of how reluctant and distressed she was when having sex with him. She always described her remarriage as “selling the soul (*chumai linghun* 出賣靈魂),” because it was against her will and it could not bring her happiness. However, “if I hadn’t [been remarried], it would be these children who suffered [instead of me].” In her own case, lack of good education is always a big regret in her life. If it were not for her Japanese teacher’s insistence, A-ma would not have been able to return to school and finish her elementary education after quitting school to take care of her dying mother when she was nine years old. Even her father, a man, was unable to afford his child’s education, a woman as weak as she could only encounter greater hardship. When I asked, between Lin and Wang, who was a better husband, she responded enthusiastically, “About this, you finally raised a fundamental question! The way Wang pampered me, in my life, I was really . . . , as a woman, I was really a blessed wife. In my years with Lin. . . I was so tired that I almost collapsed, six years like that. But if you ask me whom I would marry in my next life, I would still say Lin. Because all my affection has been given to him; for Wang, I have no affection.”

<sup>13</sup> A-ma implied the low frequency of having sex with Wang by admitting that she had little knowledge of birth control. She said, “Each time he touched me, I got pregnant.”

## Conclusion

This study is about one person, A-ma, and her dreams. The spontaneous recounting of these dreams occurred unexpectedly during my interview on child-rearing beliefs for a different study, which turns out to be a better method than purposely eliciting dream reports as ethnographic objects (Tedlock 2001). Instead of conducting content or psychoanalytical analysis of A-ma's dreams, this work attempts to shed light on the nature of culture and the self by examining the possible contextualized meaning of a most personal and idiosyncratic experience. A-ma, now in her 70s, grew up in a fishing village in southern Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. Throughout her life, she has witnessed World War II, the KMT rule, post-war economic and industrial development and the recent democratic progress in Taiwan. She was married and widowed twice, and devotes most of her life to her first husband, Lin, with whom she only had a six-year relationship. After being widowed (at age 25) and making a living on her own for 13 years, due to increasing financial pressure she remarried (at age 38) in order to fulfill a promise she gave to Lin at his funeral—to raise his children to the best of her ability. In her 24-year marital life with Wang (four times longer than that of Lin), she tried hard to avoid a sexual relationship with him, and refused to start up a new family under a different surname. Thus, although on the surface, she had violated widowhood chastity, in reality, at least in her heart, she remained loyal to Lin and managed to carry on his family line for him. Despite the fact that she herself had only six years of education, with Wang's tender love and support, she was able to provide her children with higher education.

What stood out in the recounting of her life is a sequence of simple yet compelling dreams. In addition to the near- and after-death dreams about her two men, A-ma's first husband, in particular, reappeared in her dreams whenever she had just relocated herself. He came to her 13 years after his death when she just married Wang and moved the whole family from southern Taiwan to Taipei. Subsequently, spanning three decades, Lin always appeared on the first night wherever she moved or traveled afar, even 45 years after his death. Most anthropological documents in other cultures have shown that dreams are often widely exchanged and talked about among society members, resonate in the motifs, icons or symbols of other public genres (such as folktales, songs, or myths), and may function as collectively (or provincially) understood divinations, revelations or prophetic statements (e.g., Stewart 1997; Huang and Huang 1990; Mageo 2002). A-ma's dreams do not seem to readily embrace these qualities. Nevertheless, like what Josephs (2002:452)

points out, "the 'place' where culture and person meet is the person's act of meaning-making, in which culture is linked to and transformed through the experiencing person." In the process of finding meaning in her dreams, A-ma inevitably engaged intensive dialogical interactions between the self and powerful cultural systems instantiated in concrete daily life experiences.

A-ma apparently did not remember all her dreams. Nor did the dreams she remembered and repeatedly narrated carry the same weight. The 40 informants' responses as well as my analysis suggest that the meanings of these dreams, to some extent, can be intersubjectively shared and sympathetically understood. A-ma's dreams, particularly the recurrence of Lin, were not simply the residues of the day for her; they not only were heavily charged and invested with sentiments and affects, but also offered her an imaginative but real space to sort out the conflicts and dilemmas in her real-life experiences. She was torn between the values of chastity and education, the roles of a responsible mother and a faithful wife, the double missions of staying chaste and providing for her children to the best of her ability, the eternal love toward her first man and guilt feelings toward the second, the interests of her eldest son (as an extension of Lin) and their step-father, as well as her own ideal self and pragmatic self.

Indeed, certain experiences and emotions might be highlighted due to "hypercognized" culturally mediated resources and schemas (Levy 1984). At the same time, individuals also actively and creatively appropriate cultural symbols and beliefs and imbue them with emotional saliency and motivational force (Hollan 2000). Through construction and reconstruction, interpretation and reinterpretation, these dreams contributed towards an integrated and rationalized sense of self-identity that helped A-ma to move forward purposefully and meaningfully in her life. Such a meaning making process cannot be confined to the tangible material world. Any point along the life span is not fixed or isolated, but exists in a space-time continuum that connects the past and the present, the previous life and the next life.

To conclude, when placing the self in culture, culture should not be considered merely as a set of abstract, tidy and monolithic governing principles or ideologies, a homogenous, coherent and timeless whole, or something outside the person. At the same time, the self is neither a self-contained entity that exists in a vacuum, nor a passive receptor, a fax-like copy, or a mere reflection of the outside world and events. Culture to the self is—like, in Briggs's (1998:14) metaphor—"a 'bag of ingredients' actively used by individuals in creating and maintaining their social-cultural worlds." Likewise, according to Nagel (1994:163), "Culture is not a shopping cart that comes to us already loaded with a set of historical cultural goods. Rather we construct culture by

picking and choosing items from the shelves of the past and the present.” These choices are never free, but weighted by emotion-laden experiences and a hierarchy of values and beliefs, which may or may not support one another. Such a dynamic and fluid view of self in culture is at once collective and individual, subjective and objective. It accepts the inherent untidiness and the inevitable ambiguities of everyday life and allows room for individual imagination and creativity. This is also why Hollan (2000:547) argues, “[Theories of culture] must come to terms with an actor whose consciousness and self-states are fluid and dynamic, whose motives are overdetermined and sometimes contradictory, and whose ways of ‘not knowing’ about his or her own actions and intentions are labyrinthine. A complex model of the actor must be at the center of social and culture theory.”

## References

Berry, John

- 2000 Cross-Cultural Psychology: A Symbiosis of Cultural and Comparative Approaches. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3(3):197-205.

Briggs, Jean L.

- 1998 Inuit Morality Play: The Emotional Education of a Three-Year-Old. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

D'Andrade, Roy

- 1990 Some Propositions about the Relations between Culture and Human Cognition. In *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. J. W. Stigler, R. A. Shweder, and G. Herdt, eds. Pp. 65-129. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

D'Andrade, Roy, and Claudia Strauss, eds.

- 1992 *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eckensberger, Lutz H.

- 1990 From Cross-Cultural Psychology to Cultural Psychology. *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* 12(1):37-52.

Fung, Heidi

- 1994 The Socialization of Shame in Young Chinese Children. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago.
- 1999 Becoming a Moral Child: The Socialization of Shame among Young Chinese Children. *Ethos* 27(2):180-209.
- 2001 Unheard Voices: Meanings of Love and Marriage as Experienced by a Taiwanese Elderly Woman. Paper Presented at the American Anthropological Association annual meetings, Washington, DC, November 28-December 2.

Fung, Heidi 馮涵棣, and Chen Eva C. H. 陳倩慧

- 2001 Across Time and beyond Skin: Self and Transgression in the Everyday Socialization of Shame among Taiwanese Preschool Children. *Social Development* 10(3): 419-436.
- 2002 Qingxu, wenhua yu daode shejiaohua: yi xiuchigan wei li de tantao 情緒、文化與

- 道德社教化：以羞恥感為例的探討 (Affect, Culture, and Moral Socialization: Shame as an Example). In *Qinggan, qingxu yu wenhua: Taiwan shehui de wenhua xinli yanjiu* 情感、情緒與文化：臺灣社會的文化心理研究 (Affect, Emotion and Culture: Anthropological and Psychological Studies in Taiwanese Society). Hu T. L. 胡台麗, Hsu M. T. 許木柱, and Yeh K. H. 葉光輝, eds. Pp. 17-48. Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Minzuxue Yanjiusuo 臺北：中央研究院民族學研究所.
- Geertz, Clifford
- 1984 "From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. In *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine, eds. Pp. 123-136. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodnow, Jacqueline J., Peggy J. Miller, and Frank Kessel, eds.
- 1995 *Cultural Practices as Contexts for Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hermans, Hubert J. M., and Harry J. G. Kempen
- 1998 Moving Cultures: The Perilous Problems of Cultural Dichotomies in a Globalizing Society. *American Psychologist* 53(10):1111-1120.
- Hollan, Douglas
- 2000 Constructivist Models of Mind, Contemporary Psychoanalysis, and the Development of Culture Theory. *American Anthropologist* 102(3):538-550.
- 2001 Developments in Person-Centered Ethnography. In *The Psychology of Cultural Experience*. C. C. Moore and H. F. Mathews, eds. Pp. 48-67. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holland, Dorothy, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain
- 1998 *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holland, Dorothy, and Naomi Quinn, eds.
- 1987 *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, Gui-chao 黃貴潮, and Huang Shiun-wei 黃宣衛
- 1990 Yiwan Ameizuren dui meng de kanfa 宜灣阿美族人對夢的看法 [Interpretation of Dreams in the Tribe Ami in Yiwan]. *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan minzuxue yanjiusuo ziliao huibian* 中央研究院民族學研究所資料彙編 (Field Materials, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica) 1:67-81.
- Hwang, Kuang-kuo, and Chung-fang Yang, eds.
- 2000 Indigenous, Cultural, and Cross-Cultural Psychologies. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3(3). [Special issue]
- Josephs, Ingrid E.
- 2002 Self-Construction in a Nightly Gathering of Culture and Person: Rendezvous or Conflict? *Culture and Psychology* 8(4):449-458.
- Kroeber, Alfred L., and Clyde Kluckhohn
- 1952 *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Cambridge: Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.
- LeVine, Robert A.
- 1982 *Culture, Behavior and Personality: An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Psychosocial Adaptation*. New York: Aldine Publishing Company.
- 1984 Properties of Culture: An Ethnographic View. In *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine, eds. Pp. 67-87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levy, Robert I.

- 1984 Emotion, Knowing, and Culture. *In* Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine, eds. Pp. 214-237. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liu, Fei-wen

- 2001 Confrontation between Fidelity and Fertility: *Nüshu*, *Nüge*, and Peasant Women's Conceptions of Widowhood in Jiangyoung County, Hunan Province, China. *Journal of Asian Studies* 60(4):1051-1084.

Mageo, Jeannette M.

- 2002 Intertextual Interpretation, Fantasy and Samoan Dreams. *Culture and Psychology* 8(4):417-448.

Markus, Hazel R., and Shinobu Kitayama

- 1991 Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation. *Psychological Review* 98:224-253.

Markus, Hazel R., Shinobu Kitayama, and Rachel J. Heiman

- 1996 Culture and "Basic" Psychological Principles. *In* Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles. E. T. Higgins and A. W. Kruglanski, eds. Pp. 857-913. New York: The Guilford Press.

Markus, Hazel R., Patricia R. Mullally, and Shinobu Kitayama

- 1997 Self-Ways: Diversity in Mode of Cultural Participation. *In* The Conceptual Self in Context: Culture, Experience, Self-Understanding. U. Neisser and D. A. Joling, eds. Pp. 13-61. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mathews, Holly F., and Carmella C. Moore

- 2001 Introduction: The Psychology of Culture Experience. *In* The Psychology of Cultural Experience. C. C. Moore and H. F. Mathews, eds. Pp. 1-18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, Peggy J., and Jacqueline J. Goodnow

- 1995 Cultural Practices: Toward an Integration of Culture and Development. *In* Cultural Practices as Context for Development. J. J. Goodnow, P. J. Miller, and F. Kessel, eds. Pp 5-20. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nagel, Joane

- 1994 Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture. *Social Problems* 41:1001-1026.

Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps

- 2001 Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Poortinga, Ype H., Frons J. R. Van de Vijver, R. C. Joe, and Johan M. H. Van de Koppel

- 1987 Peeling the Onion Called Culture: A Synopsis. *In* Growth and Progress in Cross-Cultural Psychology. C. Kagitcibasi, ed. Pp. 22-34. Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Quinn, Naomi

- 2003 Child Rearing and Selfhood, or, Culture and Personality. Unpublished manuscript.

Segall, Marshall H., Walter Lonner, and John W. Berry

- 1998 Cross-Cultural Psychology as a Scholarly Discipline: On the Flowering of Culture in Behavioral Research. *American Psychologist* 52(10):1101-1110.

Shore, Bradd

- 1996 Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning. New York: Oxford University Press.

- 1998 What Culture Means, How Culture Means. Heinz Werner Lecture Series. Vol. 22. Worcester: Clark University Press.
- Shweder, Richard A.
- 1991 Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
  - 1999 Why Cultural Psychology? *Ethos* 27(1):62-73.
  - 2000 The Psychology of Practice and the Practice of the Three Psychologies. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3(3):207-222.
  - 2001a Culture: Contemporary Views. *In* International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Oxford: Elsevier.
  - 2001b Cultural Psychology. *In* International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Stewart, Charles
- 1997 Fields in Dreams: Anxiety, Experience, and Limits of Social Constructionism in Modern Greek Dream Narratives. *American Ethnologist* 24(4):877-894.
- Strauss, Claudia, and Naomi Quinn
- 1997 A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tedlock, Barbara
- 2001 The New Anthropology of Dreaming. *In* Dreams: A Reader on the Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming. K. Bulkeley, ed. Pp. 249-264. New York: Palgrave.
- Voestermans, Paul
- 1997 Cultural Psychology Looks at Culture. Paper presented at the 7th Conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology. Berlin, Germany.
- Yang, Kuo-shu
- 2000 Monocultural and Cross-Cultural Indigenous Approaches: The Royal Road to the Development of a Balanced Global Psychology. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3(3):241-263.

Heidi Fung  
 Institute of Ethnology  
 Academia Sinica  
 Nankang, Taipei, Taiwan 11529  
 hfung@sinica.edu.tw



# 當文化碰到心靈：

## 試由一位阿嬤的人生與夢理解文化脈絡中的自我

馮涵棟

中央研究院民族學研究所

做為一位探究人類發展過程的文化心理學者，筆者不時會被一個問題困擾：在個人、主觀、私密的心智活動中，文化究竟在哪裡呈現？這些年來，因為跨文化心理學、本土心理學與文化心理學之蓬勃興起，心理學界日益看重文化議題，接受心理現象的多元性，並重新檢視過往視為獨立個體的自我之定義。而晚近心理人類學家也益將個人心智納入文化，重視文化成員主觀的認知與生活經驗。雖然文化與自我的交互組成宛然已成共識，然而究竟我們在處理最主觀、私我的個人情感、思緒時，如何能由其中掌握集體共享的文化價值？又如何歸納文化模式之際，不輕易抹去個人的自主性？因此本文企圖藉由瞭解一位老婦人所做的一連串夢的經驗與意義，試探我們究竟應如何看待個人與文化之間相互交錯的關係。

阿嬤與筆者結識於多年前的一項幼兒社教化研究。為時兩年的參與觀察期接近尾聲時，筆者對父母們進行關於教養信念的訪談。由於阿嬤當時正值喪夫（第二任先生），她的女兒（即幼兒的母親）建議筆者不妨帶她外出散心、順便訪談。筆者照做了，不過阿嬤卻對筆者的提問沒有興趣，反倒引領筆者進入她的人生以及她的夢。那次訪談雖然「失敗」，卻讓筆者無法忘懷阿嬤的故事，因此在此後的十年間又持續聆聽，共計錄音訪談四次，取得近十二小時的資料。每次再見到阿嬤，她總是迫不及待地分享「新夢」，也重述多年前的「舊夢」。隨著時間，阿嬤更加開懷地暢談自己。

阿嬤（七十餘歲、虔誠基督徒、成長於南臺灣漁村，受過六年日本殖民時期小學教育）與青梅竹馬、父母雙亡、體弱多病而任小學教師的林先生有短暫的六年姻緣。在他二十九歲、阿嬤二十五歲時，林因病去世，留給她三名幼小的孩子。葬禮上，阿嬤向林許諾會將孩子撫養長大。獨立辛苦撫養他們十三年之後，在子女相繼將入大學的經濟壓力之下，三十八歲時阿嬤改嫁外省軍人王先生。不同於林，王分擔家務、對阿嬤十分呵護，並努力協助改善家庭經濟。阿嬤的夢基本上可以分為兩類，一類與死亡有關：兩位前夫總是在臨終前後進入她的夢裡；另一類涉及遷徙，則幾乎完全屬於第一位丈夫：當阿嬤改嫁王時，為孩子入學之故即刻遷居臺北。就在他們於新居開始夫妻生活的第一晚，林來到阿嬤夢中。之後，阿嬤遷徙數次，每次落腳新居的第一晚，林也總是出現於夢中。甚而在林往生四十五年之後，也依然在阿嬤遷入幼子家的第一晚來到夢裡。阿嬤每次夢見王，心情平靜。每次夢到林卻

總是哀傷痛哭（除了最後遷入兒子家之外）。在二十四年的再婚生活中，阿嬤設法逃避與王先生有親密關係、也拒絕讓孩子改姓。阿嬤的孩子都接受了高等教育，在她六十壽辰時，她的努力終至獲得林家兄弟的尊敬。

阿嬤顯然並非記得她所有的夢；記得且複述的夢，也並非個個都具相同分量。不論是筆者的分析或四十位受訪者的解讀都顯示阿嬤的夢提供她在情感、道德與現實之間種種掙扎的處理空間。文化與自我相遇於個人在具體生活經驗中尋求意義與認同之際。被凸顯了的情緒與動機有文化痕跡可尋，而個人也在並存卻相衝的文化模式中擇取所需。這樣的動態互動延續著過去與現在、前世與來生，既主觀亦客觀、既集體亦個人。

**關鍵詞：**文化與自我，夢，個人生命史，臺灣婦女，守寡

---