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The relational orientation framework for examining culture in Chinese societies

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Abstract
Individualist and collectivist cultural frameworks have been the dominant research paradigm in cross-cultural studies despite evidence of conceptual and measurement problems with collectivism. We propose a new theoretical framework of psychological functioning in Chinese societies that captures some of the useful elements of collectivism without its drawbacks. The relational orientation framework takes into account the variety of relations in an individual's social and cultural environment. The model comprises a structural–relational factor grounded in sociological structuration theory and relational orientation characteristics, and a rational–relational factor that captures important aspects of agency based on social exchange theory. We discuss the framework's role in providing an alternative to methodological individualism for research in Chinese societies.

Keywords
Chinese culture, collectivism, individualism, relationalism, theoretical model.

Culture informs relationships. It shapes expectations for behavior, how problems are solved, and even how relationships are created. For example, the greater complexity and

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dynamicism of organizations due to increased economic ties and migrating workforces has made understanding culture's influence on workplace relationships, managerial behavior, and organizational performance of key importance in today's globalized work environment. How do business scholars capture the impact of culture? The dominant research paradigm in cross-cultural studies for decades has been Geert Hofstede's (1980) well-known individualist and collectivist (IC) cultural frameworks. The IC frameworks capture cultural differences by reflecting contrasting views for understanding individuals. According to a review of 170 studies investigating IC concepts, the core element of individualism is "the assumption that individuals are independent of one another" while the core element of collectivism is "the assumption that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals" (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 5). In other words, the key difference in these two frameworks is the emphasis on defining individuals through traits inherent in the individual as opposed to defining individuals through the connections and obligations inherent in their relationships.

A recent meta-analysis of over 500 studies indicated that the IC framework accounts for 88% of all reported effects of cultural values in the workplace (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). It is the most popular cultural construct. Despite its popularity, a number of criticisms have been levied at the IC framework, and at the notion of collectivism in particular, due to problems with conceptualization and measurement (Voronov & Singer, 2002). A growing number of scholars have called for "another way to study culture" (Fiske, 2002, p. 84) and pointed out the "need to go beyond such a framework" (Miller, 2002, p. 104).

The goal of this paper is to take the first step in answering the call for an alternative tool for studying culture that can capture some of the useful elements of collectivism without its drawbacks. In this paper, we develop a relational orientation framework to answer this challenge in the context of Chinese culture. In the following, we first identify three main problems with the conceptualization of collectivism. Next, we highlight how methodological individualism is often embedded in research based on the individualist–collectivist paradigm and discuss the issues this practice raises for researchers in non-Western societies. We then review previous relation-centered approaches to analyze the psychology of Confucian traditions and develop our proposed framework.

Problems with collectivism

A careful review and reanalysis of the data in the previous literature, Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener (2005) indicated that the conceptual definition of individualism is clear, instruments for measuring it are significant, and it is a valid and important dimension for measuring cultural differences. However, they found that the definitions of collectivism are ambiguous and varied, and the validities of the instruments for measuring it are undetermined. Schimmack et al. concluded that it is necessary to reevaluate the meaning of collectivism. This is not a new observation. Oyserman et al.'s (2002) comprehensive review of the IC literature to date identified similar weaknesses in theoretical conception and measurement of collectivism. Fiske (2002) criticized the conceptualization of

collectivism by pointing out that individualism is the sum of cultural characteristics by which Americans define themselves, while collectivism is a formalization of the characteristics of the "antithetical other" in accordance with the American ideological understanding that "[w]e are not that kind of person" (p. 84). Thus, it is not surprising to find problems with its conceptualization.

We identified three main problem areas that scholars have highlighted in the conceptualization of collectivism. First, it is often applied in a way that conflates social bonds with all kinds of groups and networks (Brewer & Chen, 2007). When *collectivism* is used as an umbrella term, the many types of social relations within societies become obscured. For example, the term *collectivism* is often applied to assert that all relations with in-groups are of the communal sharing variety, or that pursuing group goals is always collectivistic (Miller, 2002), both of which are overgeneralizations. When types of social relations (e.g. peers, colleagues, friends, dyads, groups) are not distinguished, it is difficult to use collectivism to discriminate between societies labeled collectivistic. For example, Dien (1999) argued that although both Chinese and Japanese societies are labeled collectivistic, the Chinese maintain an authority-directed orientation while retaining strong individuality, which contrasts sharply with the Japanese pattern of peer-group orientation. Collectivism is unable to capture this distinction.

A second problem has been that the term *collectivism* is often applied in a way that conflates distinct types of autonomy (Oyserman et al., 2002). That is, collectivism is often depicted as subordination of the self to the group, which means that collectivism entails less of a sense of agency than individualism and assumes an opposition between the self and social requirements (Miller, 2002). In fact, people in cultures labeled as collectivist may not experience opposition between the self and social requirements because such cultures emphasize role-related expectations as expressions of the self. For example, fulfilling filial obligations stems from relational autonomy (Yeh, Bedford, & Yang, 2009). Separateness and relatedness can be equally agentic. Meeting social obligations does not indicate a lack of agency; agency should not be confounded with individualism. Instead, it acts as a "link between a social unit, such as a person or a group, and the larger social context, such as the community or society" (Horvath, 1998, p. 168) and refers to motivated action with a sense of efficacy toward a desired outcome. It allows individuals to adapt to the changing demands of the environment.

The third problem area is that many measures of collectivism include items that do not discriminate collectivist from individualist cultures, such as *familism* and *pleasure of belongingness* (see Oyserman et al., 2002 for a discussion of problems with these concepts). Thus, although the IC framework suggests that individualism is dominant in the West and collectivism is dominant in non-Western societies, findings from a number of studies contradict this claim. Fjneman et al. (1996) examined a number of the so-called individualist (e.g. the United States) and collectivist countries (e.g. Hong Kong) and found no difference in expectation to provide for others, supposedly a collectivist characteristic. In fact, a number of researchers have found that Americans, the most individualistic society, are no less collectivistic than people from Confucian societies. For example, Americans score the same on collectivism as Koreans, and they are higher on collectivism than Japanese on collectivism items such as *belonging to the ingroup*

(Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). Part of the problem is that the IC framework disregards the contextual specificity of cultural precepts. For example, Americans (who are very individualistic at work) may be highly collectivistic at home or church (Fiske, 2002). In a study of three collectivistic nations (Japan, Iran, and the PRC), only in Japan did collectivist behavior carry over from home life to the workplace (Tayeb, 1994). This tendency to neglect context reflects an emphasis on methodological individualism.

Methodological individualism

A major concern surrounding the IC framework has been the tendency to use an understanding of human nature based on individualism in order to comprehend non-Western societies (Oyserman et al., 2002). *Methodological individualism* – the view that social phenomena can only be understood through examination of the motivations and actions of individual agents – is embedded in mainstream psychological norms for healthy functioning. It has its roots in Western philosophical traditions involving the analysis of metaphysical identity inherited from the philosophy of early Greece. Research conducted with this perspective assumes the universality of psychological processes that are derived from mainstream Western psychological theories constructed on the normative presumptions of individualism. It entails testing existing psychological theories in diverse cultural contexts with culture considered to be the independent variable that impacts psychological processes, which are the dependent variables.

Psychologists from non-Western societies have highlighted that methodological individualism provides an incomplete understanding of people in non-Western societies (Hwang, 2014). From their perspective, because particular dispositions are formed and enacted in specific social and cultural contexts, a comprehensive understanding of psychological phenomenon is not possible without consideration of the context. In other words, by ignoring the fact that many Western theories of social psychology are culturally bound, duplication of a Western paradigm in non-Western countries can result in the neglect of cultural factors that influence the development and manifestation of behavior with the implication that they cannot solve the problems encountered in the daily lives of local people.

Because the IC research paradigm was constructed on the presumptions of individualism without a genuine consideration of non-Western cultures, claims of its universal applicability are questionable (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). In order to make progress in understanding the psychology of people in non-Western countries, an alternative to methodological individualism is needed. Although Oyserman et al. (2002) suggested that there may be a collectivism-based option to the individualist understanding of human nature, problems with the conceptualization of collectivism have led to calls for an entirely new theoretical model for psychological investigation (Wang, 2014). We propose relationalism as a possibility for organizing research aimed at understanding individuals in a Chinese context.

Relational orientation

In some respects, the tension between a focus on individuals versus a focus on context is a reflection of the historical tension between the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Although mainstream psychologists, particularly personality psychologists, have tended to explain social phenomena on the basis of psychological knowledge about individuals, sociologists (and economists and political scientists) have long taken an opposing tack by explaining social phenomena without reference to individuals. For example, Durkheim (1895/1938)) famously emphasized that social facts are external to, and not dependent upon, facts about the individual, asserting, "Every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false" (p. 129). This point of view emphasizes that the constraints and opportunities inherent in social structures have a more pronounced effect on human behavior than subjective states (Mizruchi, 1994). The structural functionalist school of sociology argues that individuals' expectations regarding other people's actions and reactions are derived from the norms, customs, traditions, and institutions that support the society as a whole (Parsons, 1975).

A number of Chinese scholars have drawn on this type of sociological perspective in exploring a relation-centered approach to analyzing the psychology of Confucian traditions. Hwang (1987) dubbed this body of work *Chinese relationalism* – the conceptualization of social existence as relation-centered as opposed to individual-centered. In the following, we integrate the work of a number of scholars of Chinese relationalism to develop our framework.

We begin with the work of Ho (1991), who aimed specifically to provide an alternative to methodological individualism for conducting psychological research in Confucian societies. Ho proposed the concept of *relational orientation* and argued that social actions follow not so much from an individual's internal feelings or needs as they do from the individual's perceptions of relationships with other people, which are shaped by shared meaning. This perspective highlights how the presence of others is always part of the calculation of social behavior, similar to Parsons' (1975) sociological argument. According to Ho, the unit of analysis should not be the *individual*, but the *individual-in-relations*. The relational process exists prior to the concept of entities (Gergen, 1994). Ho asserted that relationships may be culturally defined, as with role relationships, or socially defined, as with status relationships. Role and status relationships have enduring structural properties that are invariant across social situations. People exist through and are defined by their relationships to others; social order is ensured when all parties honor the requirements of their roles. Thus, from a relational orientation perspective, attempts to predict social behavior by individual variables alone are likely to be incomplete at best because important determinants of social behavior are located externally in the relational context, as opposed to internally within the individual.

Ho's (1991) theory of relational orientation differs from collectivism in that the emphasis is on relationships rather than on collective interests. Loyalties based on personal relationships within a collective can contradict or even subvert the interests of the larger group. Thus, it is important to recognize the constraints and requirements of

various kinds of relationships and to understand the normative expectations and behavioral rules governing them in order to assess the impact of those relationships on social behavior.

Ho's (1998) theoretical construction, relational orientation, was meant to capture the essence of social behavioral patterns in Confucian cultures. However, Ho's theory is subject to some of the same criticism as collectivism. Although it did move beyond Hsu's model of situational determinism, it still did not address how individuals achieve personal goals in the face of these strict role obligations. Individuals are seen as constrained by their roles and by the obligatory imperatives of those roles. In fact, a number of studies have portrayed autonomy as conflicting or opposed to relatedness (see Kagitcibasi, 2005) just as researchers have questioned whether autonomy is important or even exists in collectivistic cultures (Miller, 2002). Thus, the challenge is to develop a conceptualization of a relational self in which this self is expressed through social structures in interaction and yet in which self-interested action is still possible. We meet that challenge head on with our proposed framework.

The relational orientation framework

Sociologists have long grappled with the question of agency. In response, Giddens (1984) proposed structuration theory, which encompasses both structure and agency without giving primacy to either. According to structuration theory, individuals interact with structures as a system of norms and are able to alter their status in the social structure through reflexivity; structural factors do not preclude agentic behavior (Mizruchi, 1994). Instead, as Emirbayer (1997) proposed in his relational manifesto, social relations are a dynamic process. That is, in contrast to the substantialist mainstream psychological models that start with an understanding of the internal traits of individuals, relationships are a starting point for understanding psychological functioning. This perspective transforms the conceptualization of agency from a will generated internally within individuals to a dynamic between individuals and situations.

We invoke Giddens' (1984) structuration theory as the architecture of our proposed framework: we propose that structural–relational and rational–relational (agentic) factors co-exist to influence behavior. In the following, we first develop the components of the structural–relational aspect of our model and then connect it to the rational–relational components. We draw on the work of two major psychology theorists of Chinese social behavior, K. S. Yang and K.-K. Hwang, to provide the building blocks for the two elements in Giddens' architecture.

K. S. Yang (1995) proposed a theory of Chinese social orientation based on his analysis of structural factors present in Confucian societies. We drew on his theory to develop the structural–relational component of our model. Although Yang recognized the tension between agency and the pressures arising from social structures, his emphasis was on conformity. He did not address the ways in which individuals act with self-interest in consideration of these norms, or the conditions under which they might subvert norms. In order to include agency in our model, we applied K.-K. Hwang's (1987) face and

favor model, which draws on social exchange and rational choice theories, to integrate role relations into agentic decision-making and to propose the components of the rational–relational factor.

The structural component

Psychologist K. S. Yang (1995) argued that the defining characteristic of Chinese societies is social orientation, which cannot be understood without reference to social structures. Yang conceptualized the person and the (physical and social) environment as "an indivisible whole of two constantly interacting and interpenetrating parts" that are "structurally articulated but functionally inseparable" (p. 19). Yang described the tension between the person and the environment as a tension between autonomy and homonomy (trying to control or bend social structures in the environment vs. trying to fit in with them). He integrated the work of sociologists and anthropologists (e.g. Ho, 1991) to identify five key Chinese environmental structures: relational formalism, relational particularism, relational interdependence, relational fatalism, and relational harmony. We adopt Yang's social relational orientation features as the dimensions of the structural factor of our model. Each is summarized in the following.

Relational formalism refers to a tendency to use interpersonal relations to define status. For example, a person may obtain status by virtue of being a friend of a person of high standing, such as a government official. When status is defined in terms of relations, people define themselves and others in terms of social roles. Interpersonal relations are formalized in the respect that the structure of relations cannot be changed by the actors. The boundaries of any given relationship are defined by dyadic roles, which serve as a guide to proper behavior in the relationship. In other words, the format for interaction is not determined by the individuals themselves, but by their roles in relation to one another. Roles and their related behaviors are to a great extent fixed. For example, the *wu lun* (five cardinal relations) describe the specific obligations and responsibilities of father–son, ruler–minister, husband–wife, older–younger siblings, and friend–friend dyads.

Relational particularism refers to perception that relationships should be differentiated according to the degree of intimacy and hierarchy, and that ethical behavior requires favoring those with whom one is most intimate and showing respect for all superiors (Hwang, 1987). A person's standing in this differential order determines how that person will be treated. Because relationships can be dynamic, interacting with others requires continual assessment of the status of the relationship so as to know how to respond to requests and ensure behavior is ethical.

Third, recognizing the primacy of roles inherently entails acknowledgement of *relational interdependence*. K. S. Yang (1995) argued that almost all interactions are role interactions and emphasized the structurally complementary nature of interaction due to the reliance on predefined dyadic roles as cues for proper behavior. That is, the behavioral prescriptions for a given role are defined in terms of the partner's role. Interdependence is key in that performing one's role fully depends on the partner playing his or her role correctly. If both parties play their roles, both benefit, although the greater benefit goes

Table 1. Definitions of the dimensions of the structural and rational factors.

Dimension	Definition
Structural relation-centered factor	
Relational formalism	Belief that interpersonal interactions primarily hinge on the roles assumed in a given relationship
Relational particularism	The tendency to differentiate relationships according to the degree of intimacy and hierarchy
Relational interdependence	Belief in the structurally complementary nature of interaction due to reliance on predefined dyadic roles as cues for proper behavior
Relational fatalism	The belief that certain relationships are meant to happen and that the duration or even outcome of the relationship is predetermined
Harmony	Valuing harmony as an end in itself. Belief that harmony is obtained when each person knows his or her role and acts in accordance with it
Rational relation-centered factor	
Importance	Recognizing the critical importance of relationships to every aspect of daily life
Resource	Viewing relationships as a resource for development
Reliance	Reliance on relationships to solve problems
Advantage	Expecting relationship advantages that provide preemptive benefits at the expense of others

to the party with greater power. This interdependence entails an emphasis on reciprocity, which ensures equilibrium (a sense of fairness) in the relationship.

Fourth, *relational fatalism* encompasses the notion that certain relationships are meant to happen. It pertains to the occurrence of patterns of interpersonal relationships and even the duration and outcome of a relationship. As relationships may be the result of destiny, they should be accepted without complaint; one cannot change one's fate. Individuals do not create relationships, they receive them. This mindset allows for greater stability in interpersonal relations and supports the endurance of the family and the society.

The final component is *harmony*. Harmony is pursued for its own sake as an ultimate value in and of itself. Harmony is obtained when each person knows his or her role and acts in accordance with that role. Upsetting harmony not only disrupts one's own identity in the social system but may also disrupt others' identity. Thus, a person who acts outside of his or her prescribed role and violates harmony may be considered morally lacking (Bedford & Hwang, 2003).

Persons who endorse these five components are likely to be highly sensitive to interpersonal structural–relational aspects of the environment. The dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

The rational component

In order to incorporate individual agency and rational self-interest into our proposed model, we draw on a model of Chinese relations informed by social exchange theories, which feature many of the main assumptions found in rational choice theory. K.-K. Hwang's (1987) model of face and favor in Chinese societies illustrates the psychological process of social exchange and depicts the ways in which individuals in Chinese societies make resource allocation decisions. Hwang's (2014) model was intended "to represent universal mechanisms of self and social interaction that can be applied to any culture" (p. 40), although he created it based on analysis of Confucian traditions. According to the face and favor model, a resource allocator must first judge the nature of the relationship with the petitioner (their roles in relation to one another) according the intimacy/distance and superiority/inferiority in order to determine the correct decision-making norms: equality, equity, or need. The individual can then conduct an instrumental cost-benefit analysis that encompasses structural–relational considerations. For example, an exchange with a stranger would be conducted according to equity norms such that no exchange is possible unless both parties perceive the exchange to be equitable. Exchanges with family members are based on perceived need. According to Hwang's model, the constraints of the role one plays in relation to the target of interaction (structural factors) influence the extent to which the rational instrumental qualities of interaction are emphasized, and the ways in which they are enacted. Thus, we assert that Hwang's model is a natural counterpart to K. S. Yang's structural dimensions as it supports the interrelated nature of the structural and agentic (rational) factors. Moreover, Hwang (2014) described his model as a theoretical model of intentional psychology (rather than causal psychology) emphasizing the "intentional will to choose and make decisions" (p. 49).

Hwang never proposed any dimensions to support his rational exchange perspective. However, other scholars have begun this work. Using survey data from 1250 students in China, Zuo (2002) identified some cognitive and behavioral strategies for relational exchange. Building on Zuo's results, Huang (2002) used qualitative methods with professionals in Taiwan to identify four dimensions of a relational-exchange orientation that support an inclination for concern with the exchange of social resources. We adopt Huang's four dimensions to propose our rational–relational dimension: (1) *Relational importance*: A general belief in the critical importance of relationships to every aspect of daily life and recognition that it would be difficult to succeed in life without relationships. It encompasses a belief that having the right relationships can make your life better. (2) *Relational resources*: Belief that relationships are a resource for development. Relationships can be built through the exchange of favors, and accumulating relationships means having more opportunities and options in the future. (3) *Relational reliance*: The belief that if one encounters difficulty, one need not try to handle it on one's own. Instead, there is an expectation that problems can and should be solved through one's connections and relationships. Others may even have an obligation to help you. And (4) *Relational advantages*: The belief that particular relationships should bring special benefits that may be at the expense of other people. Gaining advantages over others due to

one's connections is expected and seen as a normal strategy for obtaining the resources one needs in life. The four components of the rational–relational factor are displayed in Table 1.

Discussion

We began this article by highlighting shortcomings in the conceptualization of collectivism and with the methodological individualism embedded in application of the IC framework in psychological research. We took inspiration from the call for an alternative to collectivism to reexamine Ho's (1991) proposition of methodological relationalism for investigating Chinese culture. Our analysis of Ho's work highlighted confounds with collectivism and a failure to address agency. We applied Giddens' (1984) structuration theory (which highlights the dual and intertwined importance of both macro-level structures and micro-level agency in understanding behavior) to create the architecture for our dual factor framework. We developed the building blocks for each factor from the work of Chinese scholars. The structural–relational factor rests on the dual premises that human actions are affected by social structure, and that the foundation of social order is that people have common beliefs or values and common standards for conduct. In our framework, the structural–relational elements (relational formalism, relational particularism, relational interdependence, relational fatalism, and harmony) shape the individual's position in the social network and reflect aspects of traditional Chinese values. The rational–relational factor shares a common theoretical foundation with exchange theory. The dimensions of our rational factor depict an individual's orientation to exchange aspects of relationships: importance, resource, reliance, advantages. Combining these two factors addresses both the concern that structural models neglect agency, and the concern that rational models neglect external factors; each element provides what the other lacks. We believe that our proposed framework addresses some of the shortcomings of collectivism, while also offering an alternative approach for framing research: methodological relationalism. We discuss each in the following.

The relational orientation framework and collectivism

Our framework captures some important elements of collectivism (duty and harmony), while offering a solution to some of its main criticisms. For example, the most basic way of defining collectivism is the extent to which duty to the in-group is valued (Oyserman et al., 2002). Our framework captures this element through the structural–relational components of relational formalism and relational particularism. Another indicator of collectivism is the extent to which group harmony is valued. Our framework captures this element through the structural–relational components of harmony and interdependence. It provides a more nuanced assessment because it allows the flexibility to consider dyadic relations and differentiated role requirements instead of relying solely on a general concept of *the group*, which is difficult to define across contexts and cultures. Our relational orientation framework also avoids the concepts of *familism* and *pleasure*

of belongingness, which have encumbered the individualism–collectivism framework as they do not discriminate between individualist and other cultures (see Oyserman et al., 2002 for a discussion of problems with these concepts).

Another criticism of collectivism has been that researchers often mix up different kinds of social relationships, or use the blanket term *collectivism* to represent them all. For example, H. Yang, Van de Vliert, Shi, and Huang (2008) used *communal sharing* to represent collectivist coworker relations in a Chinese company, and *exchange relations* to represent individualist coworker relations in a European firm. This characterization of relations is too broad on both counts as it fails to consider the different types of relationships that may be present in a single context, painting all colleagues with the same brush. Our framework captures a culturally universal element, exchange relations, and relates it to specific aspects of role relations, which allows the relative importance of various role relationships to be taken into account such that equity norms are not predicted to be applied universally across all relations. Instead, a person can conduct a cost-benefit analysis and apply the norms most appropriate to the relationship. And finally, whereas collectivism has been equated with a lack of agency, the relational orientation framework integrates agency into relational orientation by introducing Hwang's (1987) face and favor model, which emphasizes intentional decision-making in a relational context.

Methodological relationalism

Psychological research consists of two steps: theoretical construction and empirical research. Most mainstream psychology theories are constructed on the basis of particular groups in individualist cultures. Psychological research in a Chinese context therefore requires construction of a culture-inclusive theory by considering concepts that are shared by the local population. It is important to develop culture-inclusive theories because without them, research in non-Western societies will continue to be dominated by mainstream psychology theories, which rely on methodological individualism (see Gergen, 1994) and may fail to address concepts important or even relevant to the local population. The relational orientation framework provides an added perspective to the methodological individualism of the IC framework by offering a different way of considering the self and capturing the importance of relationships in understanding and constructing behavior. It is intended to support systematic, conceptual, and operational studies of relational strategies. In particular, it might be used to explore differences among Chinese societies, which have been little examined.

Contributions and future research

This article has made three important contributions. First, our proposal of the relational orientation framework extends the proposition of methodological relationalism (Ho, 1991) by combining theories of Chinese social relations and Chinese interpersonal interaction. Specifically, the relational orientation framework aims to refine a system for understanding Chinese psychology by combining two important factors: structural

and rational orientations. Second, the framework captures some important elements of collectivism while offering a potential solution to some of its main criticisms such as its lack of multi-dimensionality. It offers the possibility of a new avenue for exploring Chinese societies. Third, the framework directly addresses agency, a factor that has been neglected in previous measures of relationalism.

The need to identify the role of culture in the workplace led to the development of the IC paradigm and subsequent tools for capturing the impact of culture (Hofstede, 1980). Although the deficits of the current mainstream tools for measuring collectivism have long been recognized (Oyserman et al., 2002; Schimmack et al., 2005), there is not yet a satisfactory alternative to collectivism measures for capturing elements of non-Western cultures. We view the relational orientation framework as the first step in the development of a new tool that can capture important realities of Chinese relationships. The next step requires validation of the framework's dimensionality and validity in order to develop a measure to facilitate empirical research. If the factor structure of the relational framework can be validated to support development of a measure of relational orientation, it may improve on the concept of collectivism as a tool for understanding Chinese societies by leveraging the structural sociological approach of combining structural and rational models of human interaction instead of setting them in opposition to one another.

Although others have created measures of relationalism, they have been either designed by and for Westerners (e.g. Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Do Couto & Hennig, 2015) or designed as an individual personality difference measure with items selected to fit a particular research question (e.g. Leung, Chen, Zhou, & Lim, 2014; H. Yang et al., 2008). No measures of relationalism have included agency. Applying relationalism with an emphasis on both structure and agency as a methodological perspective for understanding Chinese culture may allow for greater insight into behavior and interpersonal relations in Chinese workplaces.

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