

AUTHORS' REPLY

**SHIMCHEONG IS A CASE FOR THE FIRST PERSON PSYCHOLOGY:  
A REPLY**

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**ABSTRACT.** *Shimcheong* is a concept that captures feeling in-between a person and the Other—hence it is the core of a dialogical relation. At the level of conceptual comparison, *shimcheong* is very similar to empathy. As experience, *shimcheong* is very distinguishable-- it shows phenomenological flow of mind going beyond the subjective experience. The immediate feeling state combined with reflective thinking and judgment is still subjective and private.

Keywords: phenomenology, experience, *shimcheong*, *maum*, internalization

The three commentaries (Mahmoud, 2008; Hurtado de Mendoza, 2008, and Segalo & Blanche, 2008) on our work on *shimcheong* psychology (Choi & Han, 2008) provide points for clarification and insights on some issues. We are grateful for that much of the comments and issues raised helped us to clarify our paper.

***Shimcheong* is phenomenological experience**

Hurtado de Mendoza (2008) raised a concern whether *shimcheong* is a concept or an experience. It seems our undifferentiated use of the two terms caused some confusion. The question, nevertheless, helped us to elaborate and clarify ambiguity regarding *shimcheong*. The answer to his question is-- both.

As a concept, it refers to an emotional state like the state of empathy. In daily use of the term, *shimcheong* is an authentic mental state. So it is often expressed as 'my loving *shimcheong*,' 'his hurt *shimcheong*,' 'boss's angry *shimcheong*,' 'son's shameful *shimcheong*,' and 'father's disappointed *shimcheong*,' etc. In this sense, *shimcheong* is a generic term for such state of mind and not to be taken as a particular state of emotion such as hurt, anger, happy, or shame. What differentiates the emotion of shame from the shameful *shimcheong*? It evokes strong cultural schema. Cultural schema is a culture-specific meaning system operating with narrative. Cultural narrative is the story provid-

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ing legitimacy to the felt emotion; it is cultural because every culture has its own grammar of linking situations and proper emotional experience. In a conversation between A and B, A may refer to one's own or the partner's shameful *shimcheong* due to unfulfilled promises. When that occurs, A is inviting B into an empathic mode even transitorily. The word *shimcheong* has such effect due to the strong cultural schema associated with. As described fully in the paper, cultural schema of shameful (and any kind) *shimcheong* involves authenticity of the felt emotion. *Shimcheong* is a concept like a schema in this sense. As a concept *shimcheong* is much like empathy. A good case of *shimcheong* as concept is the dialogue between a therapist and a client. The client confesses the problems which the therapist listens to actively in empathy.

*Shimcheong* is also experience. The importance of *shimcheong* would be largely gone if it operates as merely a concept. We analyzed in detail the experiential process of *shimcheong*. It is critical to note that *shimcheong* is a lived experience involving immediate experience and reflective thinking (Schutz, 1967, pp. 69-71; cited in Burch, 1990).

What is most interesting about *shimcheong* is that it shows phenomenological flow of mind going beyond the subjective experience. The immediate feeling state combined with reflective thinking and judgment is still subjective and private. This subjective experience constitutes an I-position which can be refuted or unjustified by other I-positions despite brewing up of turmoil inside. The spin-off secondary emotion of *shimcheong* sparked first by other's action enters into third stage of examination. Whether the subjective feeling state turns into social reality depends on this validating process which involves conversation with or appeal (*hasoyon*) to real others. The mode of *shimcheong* communication is this validating process where the sense of communal understanding works in background. The parties engage in conversation (verbal and nonverbal) in empathic state. This process may be phrased as externalization of personal cultures which lead to the collective culture (Valsiner, 2000). *Shimcheong* psychology is an exemplary phenomenon which shows the working of internalization (personal culture) and externalization (collective culture).

### **Shimcheong, empathy, and the other**

As an indigenous concept describing mind experience, the complexity of *shimcheong* can be easily mistaken and often regarded exotic. As we wrote in the paper, understanding of *shimcheong* requires general understanding of collective psychology such as we-ness (*woori*), *cheong*, and folk conception of mind (*maum*).

It was pointed out that *shimcheong* may be opposite to empathy (Hurtado de Mendoza, 2008) and it may be similar to *ubuntu* (see Segalo & Blanche, 2008). At the level of conceptual comparison, *shimcheong* is very similar to empathy. But as experience, *shimcheong* is very distinguishable. As Hurtado de Mendoza correctly points out, for empathy (sympathy, compassion) the initiating event is perception of

suffering in the other person while for *shimcheong*, it is negative feeling caused by unmet expectation in the self. There is more; empathy is vicariously experiencing the suffering of other's while *shimcheong* involves reflective understanding. Empathy is mode of feeling experience connecting two individuals (even strangers as in pedestrian-beggar) but *shimcheong* is aroused feeling felt against other-within-us. In summary, *shimcheong* is a mode of aroused feeling state operating within interactional cultural context requiring cultural scripts while empathy is simple intersubjective feeling state. These differences make it more difficult to translate the term cross-culturally (also similar point was raised by Mahmoud). Since the issue of translation is not our major concern, we simply note that typicality rating adopted by Hurtado de Mendoza (2007) functions good in demonstrating the culture differences but may not be suitable in catching the working process of emotion in each culture.

Segalo and Blanche (2008), placing *shimcheong* in a broader context of collective mentality, raised an interesting point that *shimcheong* may have been affected by westernization of Korea. It is no surprise that the Korean people now espouse individualistic value and behaviors more than before (Han & Shin, 2000). But the psychology of collectivism remains strong. Many studies show such collective mentality in various contexts (Choi & Choi, 1991; Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Maday & Szalay, 1976; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995). In fact, culture differences are often confirmed by many cross-cultural studies with college students who share individualistic values across culture. As we provided several cases of real life, *shimcheong* psychology is daily phenomena of psychological process. It operates in many domain of life and it functions intricately to serve both the collective and the individuals (Gregg, 2005; Hermans, 2003). Because it is a process not a specific content (i.e., a value or an emotion), people are not well aware of its operating mechanism and unwittingly engage in it.

Another point raised by Segalo and Blanche is that *shimcheong* may be an exotic Oriental thing that has little relevance to broad audience having little interest in indigenous mentality in other country. Similar mentality may be found in other cultures as well. *Amae* in Japan (Doi, 1973; Gjerde, 2000), *Ubuntu* in South Africa, and *Kapwa* in Philippine (Enriquez, 1986) contain raw sentiments much like *shimcheong*. To be more accurate, *amae* shares some similarity to *shimcheong* in terms of the interactional process but *ubuntu* and *kapwa* are more like *woori* (we-ness) in that the latter three terms refer to affective state rather than process. More analysis is needed to show the working of the concepts and experiential nature of those concepts.

We are well aware of the risk of characterizing culture through a particular mental state. It often pictures the local as exotic and reifies the culture (Azuma, 2000). Nevertheless, the study of local mind often provides important insights into the working of mind unexamined from the western perspective. We'd like to conclude this reply by emphasizing the importance of studying the local mind.

### Culture, folk mind, and psychology

The main producers of modern psychological knowledge target the understanding of local people. Socioculturality is nothing more or less than locality. Sampson (1993) warns us how distinctively individualistic the USA people are. Despite this, the psychological theories developed in the USA travel across cultures and are generally well received. Why?

Investigations in the field of cross-cultural psychology show that the folk conception of mind is different across cultures (Lillard, 1999). The difference is alarming sometimes. The folk conception of mind is well reflected in dictionary. In English, mind is firstly defined as mental elements of which most significance is given to memory and thinking (Oxford English Dictionary; Simon & Weiner, 1989). Cartesian thinking of mind as separated from body is long gone but Cartesian perspective of objectifying the mind has been the driving engine for contemporary psychology. Perhaps this perspective serves well for the modern psychology. Here, mind is dissected into many elements which served as target of investigation as if they are equivalent to physical objects. The mind is always out there for observation. In this perspective, agent I has no place, it is slippery eel, often treated illusionary as has been done with free will (Danziger, 1997, p. 44; Gopnik, 1993).

Korean conceptualization of mind is far different. Korean dictionary explains the entry of mind (*maum*) as the integrative complex of mental faculty where the focus is on the agentive control function over its elements such as memory, affection, and intention. Since agency is the crux of mind, Korean study of mind (*shimhag* ‘心學’) under heavy influence of Confucian thought has focused on how to control, discipline, and cultivate the mind. In this tradition, mind becomes a matter of concern when activated. *Shimcheong* is an illustrative case of this aroused mind.

It is critical to notice that the different path taken for the development of mind science in the two cultures. Choi (1998) characterized the approach of modern psychology as the Third-person psychology and proposed the First-person psychology to construct upon the strong agency aspect of Korean mind. More recently, Han and Choi (in press) proposed—to unite the two psychologies—a comprehensive model of human mind. According to this model, human experiences the worldly events in two chambers. In the chamber of *things*, people take the third person perspective; objectify the event and analyze it following mechanistic logic of thinking. On the contrary, in the chamber of *maum*, people take the first person perspective; subjectively experience the event and respond as such. We are all capable of operating in both chambers at any moment. In a close relationship, we are more likely to treat relational event in the *maum* chamber for in such relationship the agent I is usually involved. But, depending upon the context, we may switch into the chamber of *things* even in a close relationship. We may associate certain culture predominantly with certain chamber (e.g., Nisbett, 2003).

But the evil is to fixate. Modern psychological research is mostly geared to advance knowledge operating in the chamber of *thing*. But the chamber of *maum* has been unnoticed or neglected for the western conception of folk mind is heavily biased toward the chamber of *things*. Despite this bias, mind operation in the chamber of *maum* is daily occurrence across cultures. In fact, much of the dialogue among I-positions take place in between the two chambers.

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