

Chinese Thinking Patterns or Errors



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Chinese population

- Most populous in the world (e.g., China, 1,330,044,544 (July 2008 est., <http://geography.about.com>))
- Constitute 76.4% of people in Singapore (4,608,167 July 2008 est., focusSingapore.com)
- Main constituent among Asians in New Zealand (18.9% of 4,173,460 July 2008 est., newzealand.govt.nz)
- Up and coming business people
- Biggest group of clients/patients?

Sources of Paper

- Personal experience in therapy with clients
- Feedback from MHPs on therapy and Chinese clients (presented at the 1st Asian CBT Conference in Hong Kong)
- Survey with class of multicultural Singaporean students on positive psychology
- Verified with participants at the 2nd Asian CBT Conference in Thailand
- Published articles

Sources of Paper

- Basing on *Automatic (Negative) Thoughts* by Aaron T. Beck
- and *Common False Beliefs* by Adele B. Lynn
- Combining and Modifying the said Thoughts and Beliefs
- Proposed new definitions and labels

Aaron T. Beck's List of (-ve) Automatic Thoughts

| Label | Explanation |
|---|--|
| All-or-nothing thinking | (Also called black-and-white, polarized, or dichotomous thinking): You view a situation in only two categories instead of on a continuum. Example: "If I'm not a total success, I'm a failure." |
| Catastrophizing | (Also called fortune telling): You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes. Example: "I'll be so upset, I won't be able to function at all." |
| Disqualifying or discounting the positive | You unreasonably tell yourself that positive experiences, deeds, or qualities do not count. Example: "I did that project well, but that doesn't mean I'm competent; I just got lucky." |
| Emotional reasoning | You think something must be true because you "feel" (actually believe) it so strongly, ignoring or discounting evidence to the contrary. Example: "I know I do a lot of things okay at work, but I still feel like I'm a failure." |
| Labelling | You put a fixed, global label on yourself or others without considering that the evidence might more reasonably lead to a less disastrous conclusion. Example: "I'm a loser. He's no good." |
| Magnification/minimization | When you evaluate yourself, another person, or situation, you unreasonably magnify the negative and/or minimize the positive. Example: "Getting a mediocre evaluation proves how inadequate I am. Getting high marks doesn't mean I'm smart." |
| Mental filter | (Also called selective abstraction): you pay undue attention to one negative detail instead of seeing the whole picture. Example: "Because I got one low rating on my evaluation [which also contained several high ratings] it means I'm doing a lousy job." |

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| Mind reading | You believe you know what others are thinking, failing to consider other, more likely possibilities. Example: "He's thinking that I don't know the first thing about this project." |
| Over-generalization | You make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation. Example: "[Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting] I don't have what it takes to make friends." |
| Personalization | You believe others are behaving negatively because of you, without considering more plausible explanations for their behavior. Example: "The repairman was curt to me because I did something wrong." |
| "Should" and "must" statements | (Also called imperatives): you have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave and you overestimate how bad it is that these expectations are not met. Example: "It's terrible that I made a mistake. I should always do my best." |
| Tunnel vision | You only see the negative aspects of a situation. Example: "My son's teacher can't do anything right. He's critical and insensitive and lousy at teaching." |

Common False Beliefs for the Business World by Adele B. Lynn

| Label | Explanation |
|----------------------|--|
| Need approval | Everyone I work with must approve me at all times; which is impossible and may be viewed as indecisive. Example: “I don’t want you to be upset with me.” |
| Making mistakes | I must prove thoroughly competent, adequate and achieving at all times; which means difficult to take advice or ask for help. Example: “We have this running smoothly, so why change it?” |
| Changing others | I have an obligation to change others who act unfairly or obnoxiously; frustration will hijack to the point of insulting others. Example: “I told you about this before.” |
| Catastrophize | When I get frustrated, treated unfairly, or rejected, I have to view things as awful, terrible, horrible and catastrophic. Example: “Oh no, what am I going to do?” |
| Others cause misery | My emotional misery comes from external pressures that I have little ability to change. Example: “Why me?” |
| Worry, fret and fear | If something seems dangerous or fearsome, I must preoccupy myself with it, and make myself anxious with it. Example: “I’m so concerned about...” |

Common False Beliefs for the Business World by Adele B. Lynn

| Label | Explanation |
|--------------------------|--|
| Avoidance | It is easier to avoid facing difficulties and self-responsibilities than to do something about them; which means feeling helpless. Example: “Well, I’ll just wait and see....” |
| The Past | My past remains all important and, because something once strongly influenced my life, it has to keep determining my feelings and behaviour today. Example: “I don’t know. I tried it once and it didn’t work.” |
| Unrealistic expectations | People and things should turn out better than they do, and I must fix them. There is a line between responsibility to help and responsibility to fix. Example: “I don’t care. What do you want?” |
| Competition | My worth can be measure by competitive situation. Needs to be the best. Difficult to share and counter to the culture of teamwork. Example: “I have to score better than him.” |
| Source of problems | The people and conditions in my life are the source of my problems. No reason to take responsibility for our problems. Example: “If he would just stop doing...my life would be better.” |
| Negativity | Certain occurrences or events are negative by nature. Can’t see something positive in an event or situation. Example: “No one will ever come out of this.” |

Chinese Thinking/Errors

- Not meant to hurt anyone's feelings
- Not meant to be exhaustive
- Apply to many but not all
- Would hopefully contribute to therapy
- Need MHPs and researchers to verify them in their work; and provide feedback for improvement

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Life

- *Much of life is outside my control*
- Matching Labels: Emotional Reasoning; Magnification/minimization; Sources of Problems
- Proposed New Label: **Matter of Fate**

Examples:

- “Life is such. It’s my luck.”
- “Oh, I’m the most unlucky person in life.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Life

- *Children will grow up and outgrow problems*
- Matching Label: Unrealistic Expectations
- Proposed New Label: **Unrealistic Expectations (redefined)**

Examples:

- “My job is to bring up my kid(s); the school’s role is to discipline them.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Life

- *Education is the ticket to career and life, happiness and prosperity*
- Matching Labels: All-or-Nothing; Emotional Reasoning; Should & Must; Competition
- Proposed New Label: **Unrealistic Expectations (redefined)**

Examples:

- “Education come first, play or sports or rest come later.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Life

- *Older folks are always like this. They are beyond change*
- Matching Labels: Labelling; Others cause Misery
- New Label: **Beyond Change**

Examples:

- “The older folks never shed their spots. Always grumpy, nagging, nothing to do, while their time away at void decks, etc.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Life

- *Family problems stay within the home*
- Matching Labels: Personalisation; Others cause Misery; Avoidance
- New Label: **Keeping Secrets**

Examples:

- “Never say or spread your family problems outside the home. That’ll be bad for reputation of the family.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Environment

- *Lack of awareness of surrounding. Self-centred thinking/viewpoint*
- Matching Label: Mind Reading; Tunnel Vision; Unrealistic Expectations
- New Label: **Self-centredness**

Examples:

- “Yes, you can get it from that shop.”
- “Oh yes, it good for you.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Environment

- *Expensive stuff is good. Anything discounted or free is good. Take first and complain later*
- Matching Labels: All-or-Nothing; Should & Must; Mental Filter
- New Label: All-or-Nothing (redefined)

Examples:

- “Don’t have never mind, if I have it, it is fine.”
- “Better to have it than lose it or let others have it.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Environment

- *Avoid difficult situations*
- Matching Labels: Tunnel Vision; Avoidance; Others cause Misery; Negativity
- New Label: **Face-saving**

Examples:

- “It’s all because of them, why do they do such things, so reckless.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Western illness Western medicine; Eastern illness Eastern medicine*
- Matching Labels: Should & Must; The Past
- New Label: **The Past**

Examples:

- “My parents believed in Chinese medicine for its gentle effect and its ability to eradicate the roots of the disease. I was more inclined to use Western medicine for its immediate effect in treating signs and symptoms.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Quick fix is the preferred treatment mode for any illness*
- Matching Label: Emotional Reasoning; Personalisation; Should & Must
- New Label: **Pragmatic**

Examples:

- “Can I get well with just this session?”
- “How much?”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Somatisation of illness*
- Matching Label: Worry, Fret and Fear
- New Label: **Face-saving**

Examples:

- “Oh, I’ve got this backache. Must have overworked myself.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Traditional healing system is still good*
- Matching Label: Should & Must; The Past
- New Label: **The Past**

Examples:

- “The shaman or bomoh can help relieve my problems if the doctor cannot.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Mental illness is stigmatized and equated with craziness*
- Matching Labels: All-or-Nothing; Emotional Reasoning; Labelling; Overgeneralization; Avoidance; Negativity
- New Label: **All-or-Nothing**

Examples:

- “Don’t go near someone with this illness. Mental illness could be contagious.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *The sick usually plays up the sick role*
- Matching Labels: Disqualifying or Discounting the Positive; Over-generalization; Need approval; Unrealistic Expectations; Catastrophize
- New Label: **My Turn**

Examples:

- “I’ve been looking after all of you, now that I’m sick, it’s your turn to look after me.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Health and Illness

- *Chinese coping skills are problem- or emotion-focused*
- Matching Label: Emotional Reasoning; Mental Filter; Should & Must; Source of Problems
- New Label: **Pragmatic**

Examples:

- “Go for the problem or the solution.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Religion/Spirituality

- *Many Chinese Singaporeans are brought up under Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism. However, a good many are now Christian converts*
- Matching Label: Emotional Reasoning; Over-generalization; Personalisation; Changing Others; The Past; Unrealistic Expectations
- New Label: **Matter of Faith**

Examples:

- “My faith is in Christianity or Buddhism or Taoism; therefore, I’ll do/not do this and that because of my faith/religion/belief.

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *Authority is always right*
- Matching Labels: Labelling; Mental Filter; Overgeneralization; Mental Filter
- New Label: **The Authority**

Examples:

- “Because they are trained or in charge, they must know how and have answers to my problems.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *Have to compare with others—from objects to pay to children to houses to jobs*
- Be competent or cannot lose to others.
- Matching Label: Mind Reading; Personalisation; Competition
- New Label: Competition (existing)

Examples:

- “I must show them I can do it. I cannot let myself down.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *Need to tell others what to do*
- Matching Label: Changing Others
- New Label: **Changing Others (existing)**

Examples:

- “These people don’t know what they are missing. They have not learnt this.”
- “They are not aware of this, I must tell/teach them.”
- *Note: This is done in spite of not knowing the whole truth of the matter themselves; i.e., not asking for or learning of information on matter but like to advise on them.*

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *Need to please others*
- Matching Label: Needing Approval; Making mistakes
- New Label: Needing Approval (existing)

Examples:

- “I must not let them be unhappy with me.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *The capable/rich and better off should automatically help the less well off*
- Matching Label: Should & Must; Unrealistic Expectations
- New Label: **The Authority**

Examples:

- “You are capable and rich, therefore you must help me.”

Chinese Thinking/Errors

Attitude/Belief towards Relationships

- *Filial piety—relating to face, entails loyalty, devotion, respect and obedience to one's parents, especially the father, and the family's name*
- Matching Label: Emotional Reasoning; Should & Must; Needing Approval; Avoidance; The Past
- New Label: **Filial Piety**

Examples:

- “It is my duty to look after my parents and/or grandparents. They come before anything else.”

Chinese Thinking Patterns or Errors

Thank you for your attention.

Questions?

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