Synopsis of the Book

Part I Conceptual foundations for the analysis of Chinese emotions

- Chapter 1 focuses on the rationale and methodology of the book. Replacing the ever expanding list of attributes in cross cultural psychology, I offer an explanatory model of culture to explain the well documented cross cultural differences in cognitive styles. More specifically, I use the framework of symmetry and symmetry breakdown, derived from physics, to explain how cultures that differentially privilege relational and non-relational cognition are mirror-images of each other.

- Chapter 2 examines harmony as the Chinese version of symmetry. Harmony has been found to both help as well as hinder creativity and other important human flourishing. Scholars have also drawn a distinction between optimal and suboptimal harmony, known as deep versus superficial, true versus false harmony, and so on. This chapter uses the framework of symmetry and symmetry breakdown to explain the difference between these two versions of harmony, and to guide a structural analysis of optimal harmony.

- Chapter 3 focuses on an analysis of Confucianism. Once Nisbett (2003) asked a Chinese scholar why Westerners and Easterners had developed different ways of thinking, the scholar replied, “Because you had Aristotle and we had Confucius” (p. 29). This chapter explains this enigmatic answer. More specifically, it shows how in contrast to Plato and Aristotle who privileged reason and logic, Confucius considered the cultivation of emotions (qing) the goal of education, and used poetry as a primary means for this goal.

- Chapter 4 focuses on an analysis of Daoism. If Confucianism privileges the coordination games of group living, how does the quest for autonomy and independence fair in the collectivist niche of traditional China? The answer is very well, thanks to Daoism. Daoist values are examined, with special emphasis on the fact that Daoism shares with Confucianism an interest in intimacy in relationships, except that in Daoism intimacy has shifted to the transcendent context of communion with Nature.

Part II. Chinese emotions in the everyday
Chapter 5 focuses on empathy-based emotions. A primitive form of empathy, akin to contagion, was promoted and used by the Confucian philosopher Mencius as the building blocks of his moral edifice. This chapter examines a household term-- *xin-teng* (heart-aching love) -- to show how, consistent with the moral vision of Mencius, Chinese learn morality at their mothers’ lap.

Chapter 6 examines the art of intimacy from Chinese poetics to the everyday. The West tends to define intimacy in terms of the behavioral and experiential characteristics of a relationship. By contrast, the Chinese notion of intimacy focuses on the epistemological and ontological transformations of this relationship. The Chinese notion of intimacy poses to emotion theory an interesting question: Does the self get a boost from positive emotions, such as intimacy, to be grounded more firmly in its self-esteem, or does it thereby vault over its ego and land in a different universe--the “we-ness”?

Chapter 7 explores the influence of Daoism on Chinese emotions. Spontaneity is considered the hallmark of true feelings. This Daoist doctrine of freedom and authenticity in emotion has far reaching implications for both cognitive appraisal and dual-process theories in contemporary psychology.

Chapter 8 focuses on hierarchy-based emotions. Fitting in is very important in collectivist cultures, where the individual needs to suppress his or her personal needs and feelings in order to fit in, so the collectivism story goes. Yet, there is room for indulgence in selfishness in the Confucian society, provided that you assume the lower status of being young and immature. The term that marks the site of selfishness reserved for the young and immature is *sajiao*, which refers to the behaviors of young children who act like spoiled brats, and by extension, young women acting childish as a form of flirtation. The focus of *sajiao*, however, falls not on the selfish and sometimes downright manipulative behaviors, so much as on the relational context of intimacy that warrants such behaviors. This chapter examines how the rationality behind this hierarchy-based intimacy fosters gratitude.

Part III. Chinese creativity

Chapter 9 examines emotional creativity as exemplified by the lives of hermits. This chapter calls attention to the so far neglected fact that hermits in Asia embody a well-established tradition of social nonconformity and independent thinking since antiquity.
Chapter 10 focuses on savoring and its implications for emotion theory. In contrast to emotional regulation prevalent in the West, the Chinese privilege refinement of emotions. Over all in the Confucian system it is difficult to make a compelling argument for the elimination or control of something intrinsically bad in emotions. For instance, desire is not intrinsically bad in the Analects. To Confucius a desire is good or bad depending on whose desire it was, a virtuous or a petty person—a refined person would have refined desires. The main thrust therefore is on refinement, or self-cultivation. Refinement sets goals above and beyond regulation. The goal of regulation/coping/management of emotions is reached once the undesirable consequences are eliminated or held in check. The benchmarks of emotional refinement include more elusive goals such as creativity, personal growth and development. One consequence of emotional refinement is refined emotions. This chapter examines one of the most common-place practices of refined emotions, namely savoring.

Chapter 11 focuses on insight-based emotional transformations associated with the Buddhist notion of kong (emptiness). It is well documented that the Chinese prefer intuitive over formal reasoning (Norenzayan et al., 2002). It is also widely known that intuition is more conducive to creativity than analytical thinking (Sternberg, 2006). However, the connection between creativity and intuitive reasoning does not seem to carry beyond the Western hemisphere. When it comes to the cognition of the Asians, their intuitive approach is cast in the dual-systems framework of decision making (Kahneman, 2003), in which gut feelings and intuitions join the ranks of the unconscious, associative processes that are shown to be fast but error prone, relative to the conscious, systematic processing that are supposedly more accurate and capable of learning. This chapter restores the connection between intuition and creativity in the Chinese context, by investigating the Buddhist notions of kong (emptiness) and wu (enlightenment), with special focus on associated emotional transformations.

Part IV. Conclusion

Chapter 12. The term qing has been left undefined but introduced piecemeal in the previous chapters. In this concluding chapter, I give a formal definition of qing and explore its connotations as candidates for an alternative to the standard answers in mainstream psychology to the question posed by William James (1884) more than a century ago: What is an emotion?