

## **A Reflection on the Development of Buddhist Psychology in China**

*Kai Chung Joe Poon\**

Department of Social Science, The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

### **Abstract**

Starting with the creation of the term “Buddhist psychology”, this paper has reviewed the development of this discipline. The review is focused on but not limited to the Chinese academia. The term “Buddhist Psychology” was first used in the Western academia by Rhys Davids (1857-1942) in her book *Buddhist psychology: an inquiry into the analysis and theory of mind in Pali literature* which was published in 1914. Interestingly, checking the Asian academia, the term “Buddhist Psychology” was used even earlier in 1898 by a Japanese scholar called Inoue Enryō (1858-1919). Later, Buddhist Psychology was introduced to China by Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and Master Taixu (1890-1947) around the 1920s. Influenced by the prevalence of Behaviourism in the West, Chinese scholars tended to have a strong mistrust of Western psychology theories at the beginning. This could be seen in the speeches and writings of Liang and Taixu. Such an attitude has a great influence on the later development of Buddhist psychology in China till now. Overall speaking, it is obvious that Buddhist psychology in the Chinese academia is strong in theoretical elaborations but relatively weak in empirical studies. Also, this paper has identified that Buddhist psychology has different trends of development in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Such differences can be attributed to historical and political reasons. While the main reason for Liang and Taixu to look down upon Western theories was caused by the prevalence of Behaviourism in the West, the continuation of such attitude can be explained by the attempts of Chinese researchers to regain recognition and esteem. This attitude is clearly shown in the discourse of Chinese researchers: “what the Western psychology has, Buddhist Psychology also has such; furthermore, we have the better one.” Based on a critical review of the past, this paper provides some suggestions for the future development of Buddhist psychology.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist Psychology, Zen Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism, East Asia, East-West dichotomy, Southeast Asia*

## 1. Introduction

“Buddhist Psychology” may seem to be a new term for most of us. Buddhism is an ancient religion which was established by Prince Siddhartha Gautama around 2,500 year ago; psychology, although has a long history, is a recently evolved discipline which uses scientific methods to study behaviours and mental processes. “Buddhist Psychology” is a term which has not appeared in Buddhist Scriptures. Apparently, it is a new term which combines an Asian religion together with a subject emphasized much on scientific methods. So, what exactly is “Buddhist Psychology”?

In fact, the term “Buddhist Psychology” is first created by a researcher from Japan. According to the research by Prof. Chen Bing, Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids (1857-1942) was the first one to use the term “Buddhist Psychology” to name her publication. She had published *Buddhist psychology: an inquiry into the analysis and theory of mind in Pali literature* in 1914 (Chen, 2015: 20) However, Poon suggested that Rhys Davids was not the first one to use this term. Sixteen years earlier, a Japanese scholar Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) had published his *Lectures on Buddhist Psychology* in 1898 (Poon, 2020: 15). It has already been over 120 years since Inoue Enryō’s *Lectures* till now. The advancement of Buddhist psychology has never stopped.

This paper intends to review the development of Buddhist psychology (with the focus of Chinese academia) and give suggestions for its future development. By studying the number of publications, trends and changes of research interests, and some common characteristics among the present writings, it is interesting to point out that the development of Buddhist psychology has significant differences between Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Influenced by the prevalence of Behaviourism at the time Chinese scholars started to explore Buddhist Psychology, they believed that studying psychology in a Western way was not an appropriate way to study Buddhist ideas about the mind. Although there are great advancements in



psychology in the West (for example, the development of Neo-Behaviourism, Humanistic Perspective, Transpersonal Psychology, etc.), a clear East–West dichotomy mindset still exists especially in studies from Mainland China. It is not difficult to find discourses like “what the Western academia has, we have it too”, sometimes we can even find more extreme discourses like “what the Western academia has, we have it also, and ours are better”. As a result, studies from Mainland China focused mainly on elaborating what we can find in the Buddhist Scriptures, doing theoretical inference about the strengths of Buddhist ideas. Relatively few empirical research was done when compared with Taiwan and Hong Kong. One of the reasons is the historical differences which made researchers from Mainland China have an Anti-American Psychology attitude. This paper suggests that the stances and attitudes of the researchers need to be changed. More interdisciplinary studies between Buddhism and psychology are urgently needed in the future. It can be achieved by facilitating more communication and exchange of ideas and experiences between researchers from different parts of Asia.

## **2. A Quantitative Review of the Development of Buddhist Psychology**

It has already been 121 years since the publication of the very first Buddhist Psychology monograph. After Rhys Davids' *Buddhist psychology*, publication of this academic realm has never stopped. For example, D.T. Suzuki, Erich S. Fromm and De Martino's *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960), Rune E.A. Johansson's *The Psychology of Nirvana* (1969), Edwina Pio's *Buddhist Psychology: A Modern Perspective* (1988), etc. Even more, there is an obvious increasing trend of relevant monographs being published after the 1970s. This part is a quantitative review about the number of book publications in academia. The literature review was conducted with the aid of Taiwan National Library and Hong Kong Academic Library Link. By searching for publications under 4 subject categories, including “Buddhism–Psychology”, “Zen Buddhism–Psychology”, “Psychotherapy–Religious aspects–Buddhism”, “Psychotherapy–Religious aspects–Zen Buddhism”, Table 1 was constructed.

About the development in Asia, after Inoue Enryō's *Lectures on Buddhist Psychology*, the studies about Buddhist Psychology also developed gradually. In Japan, an increasing number of relevant publications can be found, for instance: *A Study of Buddhist Psychology* (1916), *A Study of Buddhist Psychology* (1960), *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960), etc. About the case of China, Liang Qi-chao (1873-1929) was the first one who used the term “Buddhist Psychology”. In 1922, Liang (2001) made a speech for the Psychology Association in China. The topic of the presentation is “A Brief Inspection about Buddhist Psychology”. Later in 1925, Sik Taixu

**Table 1** Number of Publications in English

Year	Total Number of Publications
Before 1970	7
1970-1979	7
1980-1989	11
1990-1999	23
2000-2009	48
2010 till now*	40

Note: \* The literature review was done in April 2020.

(1890-1947) had also given a speech under the topic “A Study of Buddhist Psychology” (Sik 2004: 209-211). Comparatively, as one of the founders for Buddhist Psychology in China, Taixu had much more contributions to the field than Liang. Besides the speech mentioned above, Taixu had more speeches and articles about Buddhist Psychology, including: “Psychology Revolution”, “Mental Health from Buddhist Point of View”, “Behaviourism and Psychology” etc.

Thanks to the efforts of these two founders in China, the studies about Buddhist Psychology have not stopped ever since. Ma Ding-bo had published a book titled *A Study of Indian Buddhist Theories of citta, manas and vijñāna* in 1974. Pu Yang-pu had published an article titled “Buddhism and Psychology” in the *Dharma Voice* journal in 1988. Shi Yi-yu had published a book called *Talking about citta and vijñāna: In-depth Psychology* in 1993. Among all recent publications, Sik Wei-hai’s (2005) *Pañca-skandha Psychology* and Chen Bing’s (first edition in 2007, second edition in 2015) *Buddhist Psychology* are two masterpieces in the realm. With the same searching criteria and library search engines as in the above, Table 2 was constructed with the statistics of publications written in Chinese.

**Table 2** Number of Publications in Chinese

Year	Total Number of Publications
Before 1970	0
1970-1979	5
1980-1989	6
1990-1999	8
2000-2009	21
2010 till now*	12

Note: \* The literature review was done in April 2020.

### 3. Analyzing the Western Trends of Development

Besides the increasing number of publications, the trends and changes in research interests are also notable if we keep track of the themes of the publications. Interestingly, the trends in Western and Eastern academia are quite different.

The earliest writings about Buddhist Psychology were mainly theoretical in nature. For instance, Rhys Davids' (1914) *Buddhist psychology*, Guenther's (1952) *Yuganaddha*, Benoît's (1955) *The supreme doctrine*, etc. The key objective of these writings was to elaborate the concept of Buddhist Psychology. Just like what Rhys Davids had mentioned in the Preface of her *Buddhist psychology*:

While scholars are beginning to get at and decipher the long-buried treasure of Buddhist writings brought from Mid-Asia.... My book's quest is to present summarily some of the thought contained in the mother-doctrine and her first-born child, much of which is still inaccessible to him. (Rhys Davids, 1914: vii-viii)

Similar sayings also appeared in Guenther's *Yuganaddha*:

The title "Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma" outlines the scope of this book. It attempts to deal with philosophy as the perennial quest for meaning with psychology as the abstract understanding by which man is engaged in comprehending himself, as presented in the vast literature of the Abhidharma. (Guenther, 1952: vii)

Guenther even reminded his readers not to read his book with a biased mind:

The topics handled in this book are difficult as they are delicate, and their appreciation presumes a subtle, balanced and unbiased mind. (Guenther, 1952: i)

It is reasonable to infer that the main motivation in writing down such "reminders" was due to the lack of understanding about Buddhist psychological ideas in the West. Thus, early researchers had put most of their efforts in introducing and elaborating the concepts and theories of Buddhist psychology.

Later, around the 1960s to 1970s, researchers shifted their focus to comparing and contrasting Buddhist psychology with existing psychology theories. Suzuki, Fromm and Martino's (1960) *Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis*, De Silva's (1973) *Buddhist and Freudian psychology* and (1976) *Tangles and webs: comparative studies in existentialism, psychoanalysis, and Buddhism*, etc. belong to this category of publications. In the foreword of *Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis*, Erich Fromm had clearly pointed out the change of attitude in Western academia.

Any psychologist, even twenty years ago, would have been greatly surprised – or shocked – to find his colleagues interested in a “mystical” religious system such as Zen Buddhism. He would have been more surprised to find that most of the people present were not just “interested” but deeply concerned, and that they discovered that the week spent with Dr. Suzuki and his ideas had a most stimulating and refreshing influence of them, to say the least. (Suzuki 1960: 122)

Fromm had mentioned “twenty years ago” in his message. Considering the previous findings about publication status of Buddhist psychology in the West, he was talking about the time between the issue of Rhys Davids’ *Buddhist psychology* in 1914 and Guenther’s *Yoganaddha* in 1952. At around 1960s, Western academics had much more understanding about Buddhist psychology. They shifted their focus in comparing Buddhist psychology with existing psychology theories. For instance, in Fromm’s book, he had made a comparison between Zen and psychoanalysis.

This description of Zen’s aim could be applied without change as a description of what psychoanalysis aspires to achieve; insight into one’s own nature, the achievement of freedom, happiness and love, liberation of energy, salvation from being insane or crippled. (Suzuki 1960: 122)

In the citation above, Fromm tried to discuss Buddhist psychology more deeply by explaining and elaborating it with the existing psychoanalytic theories and concepts. Discussions of similar kind could often be seen in the publications issued within these two decades.

After late-1970s, there are two notable trends in the development of Buddhist Psychology, and such trends continue till now. The first one is scientific studies of Buddhist Psychology, and the second one is the application of Buddhist Psychology into psychotherapy and counselling.

Hayward’s (1987) *Shifting worlds, changing minds: where the sciences and Buddhism meet*, Pio’s (1988) *Buddhist Psychology: A Modern Perspective*, Watson’s (1999) *The Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, science, and our day-to-day lives*, etc. belong to the former type. For example, in Pio’s book, he tried to use different kinds of scientific findings to verify the effectiveness of Buddhist psychology, like presenting the data from electroencephalography (EEG), blood lactate level and oxygen consumption level to test the effects of practising mediation. Another typical example would be Levine’s (2000) *The positive psychology of Buddhism and Yoga: paths to mature happiness*. In the book, Levine quoted research findings from Harvard medical school to point out the relationship between meditation and blood pressure.

Hall’s (1979) *Buddhism and psychotherapy*, Leigh’s (1987), *A Zen approach to bodytherapy: from Rolf to Feldenkrais to Tanouye Roshi*, Nissanka

(1993), *Buddhist psychotherapy: an Eastern therapeutical approach to mental problems*, etc. belong to the latter category. For instance, Unno's (2006) *Buddhism and psychotherapy across cultures: essays on theories and practices* is a collection of essays talking about the application of Buddhist ideas into psychotherapies. One of the essays shared the author's experiences in conducting Buddhist sandplay therapy. In the essay, Yasunobu introduced the history of sandplay therapy, administrative details and also reviewed the therapy's effectiveness via case studies (Yasunobu, 2006). Naoki's sharing in end-of-life caring could be seen as another example from that book which applied Buddhist wisdom into psychotherapy. In the essay, the author shared three case studies in applying the ideas from Pure Land Buddhism into end-of-life caring. After reflecting upon previous experiences, the author presented eight detailed guidelines for the application of Buddhist end-of-life caring (Naoki, 2006). Of course, these two types of study are not mutually exclusive. Most of the studies on Buddhist Psychotherapy are scientific and empirical in nature.

To summarize the development of Buddhist psychology in the West, the whole development can be roughly divided into three phases. From the 1910s to 1950s, it is the "Introduction phase". Researchers in the West first came across with the ideas of Buddhist psychology. Maybe due to the fact that Buddhist psychology links with a religion that's foreign to them, early researchers often reminded their readers to keep an unbiased attitude to learn this new knowledge. From the 1960s to late 1970s, it was the "Communicating phase". Psychologists tried to compare and contrast Buddhist ideas about psychology with the existing concepts and theories in the Western academia. From the early 1980s to now, it is the "Verification & Extraction phase". During this period, researchers try to extract different ideas from Buddhist scriptures and try to apply them into various kinds of psychotherapy and verify the effectiveness.

#### **4. Analyzing the Chinese Trends of Development**

However, compared with the situation in Chinese publications, the development is totally different. Firstly, the most significant and notable trend is, after the 1980s, there is an increasing number of publications which belong to leisure books. This type of publication constitutes a large market share ever since. Secondly, after comparing with the West, there is one more significant difference in Chinese publications. The proportion of Chinese publications in scientific studies and application in psychotherapy is relatively less than the West. Instead of shifting the focus to scientific and empirical studies, philosophical elaborations and theoretical discussions still prevail in Chinese academia. From Liang's and Taixu's introduction about Buddhist Psychology

till now, this type of publication has never stopped. In the 1970s, there are 5 books of this type, 3 books in the 1980s, 1 book in the 1990s, 8 books in the 2000s and 2 books in the 2010s. They are books mainly focused on philosophical elaborations and theoretical discussions.

One more interesting phenomenon was found if the literature review takes into account the peer-reviewed journal articles in Chinese academia. There is a noticeable difference between the researches from Mainland China and from Taiwan and Hong Kong. For reviewing the publications in Mainland China, the Academic Journals Full-text Database (CJFD) was being selected. This is the most comprehensive gateway and the largest database in Mainland China, which is run by a state-owned enterprise held by Tsinghua University. For reviewing the publications in Taiwan, the National Central Library Periodical Information Center was being selected. It is run by the Ministry of Education of the Taiwan Government, this is the gateway with greatest credibility and also the largest database in Taiwan. For reviewing the publications in Hong Kong, since there is no representative database for Hong Kong academic journals, the review was conducted by checking the newsletters and research projects of Buddhist study/research centres run by Hong Kong's universities. To keep the discussion more focused, a specialized topic was selected in the review. Restricting the search area as "psychology", "zen" was used as the keyword for searching literature in academic databases and as the theme and topic of research projects searching among the research centres. There are 42 results in CJFD, 12 results in National Central Library's database, 9 relevant journal articles in the journal issued by Center for the Study of Chan Buddhism and Human Civilization (CUHK) and 1 relevant research project done by Centre of Buddhist Studies (HKU).

After reviewing the existing articles, one of the noticeable differences between these three regions is research methodology. Studies from Mainland China usually adopted theoretical inference or speculative thinking as their methodology and lack of empirical studies (both qualitative and quantitative researches). Empirical study has been regarded as a foundation of psychology studies in the Western academia since the late 19 century after psychology was evolved into a scientific discipline<sup>1</sup>. With theoretical inference as the main research approach, there is a writing structure commonly seen in these studies. Let's use the application of "Zen" to improve mental health of college students as an example. Shi, Xiao-bei (2018), Wu Cui-jing (2018) and Xiao Qing-yin (2020) had published articles talking about how zen therapy, tea zen and design of zentangle (a kind of drawing) could improve the mental health of college students. Despite the fact that researchers are coming from different colleges, and they are talking about different kinds of zen-related therapy, the discourse of their papers are the same. They first pointed out the contemporary mental health problems of college students from existing



literature; then, they turned to elaborate the benefits of the therapy they recommended theoretically; in the last part of their paper, by merely logical inference, they came to the conclusion that if the therapy could be used on the college students, their mental health should be able to improve. Their conclusions are more likely to be an advocacy of zen as an intervention for psychological health rather than research findings. In fact, researches with such discourse are very common in Mainland China's academia.

Comparatively speaking, this phenomenon does not appear in Taiwan and Hong Kong academia. Studies from Taiwan and Hong Kong do not lay stress on a particular research approach. Here are a few examples from Taiwan academia. When Hwang Kwang-kuo and Shiah Yung-jong develop their indigeous theory of "Mandala Model of Self", their study is an all-rounded research series which included discussion on theoretical foundation and elaboration of the model (Hwang, 2011; Shiah, 2016; Hwang, 2019) and empirical approaches via survey and quasi-experimental methods (Shiah and Hwang, 2019). Going back to the same type of research about zen, studies from Taiwan and Hong Kong never lack empirical studies as if what Western academics have been doing. For example, Lee Chi-jen (2018) has conducted a study about Zandala<sup>®</sup> Expressive art therapy (a kind of therapy very similar to zentangle) in the psychiatric daycare centre. Lee had adopted a mixed-methods approach (semi-structured interviews in the first phase, survey method in the second phase and semi-structured interviews and individual case study in the third phase) to verify the effectiveness of the programme. Another example from Taiwan academia is, Po Pei-chi (2015) had conducted a study about tea zen. In her study, she had adopted a quantitative method (questionnaire of happiness derived from Oxford Happiness Inventory) to verify the effectiveness of the tea zen programme. Using a meditative intervention project in the Centre of Buddhist Studies (HKU) as an example, Chan Ka-po (2014) had developed an Eastern based meditative intervention for pregnant Chinese women. He hypothesized that the intervention could improve the health of both mother and infant. To verify his hypothesis, he had conducted a randomized control quantitative study to verify the effectiveness of the intervention.

Another noticeable phenomenon is, there is a kind of discourse that's very common in Mainland China academia but relatively fewer in Taiwan and Hong Kong academia. In the literature review about the topic "zen" in the psychology research area, within the 42 search results there are already 8 pieces of articles related to the topic of indigenization, e.g. Peng Yan-qin (2020), Li Hui and Zhang Tao (2011) and Xiong Wei-rui and Yu Lu (2010), etc. In articles of this kind, they had presented a very similar discourse within: philosophically speaking, zen consists of wisdom and very great insights to humans, research methods coming from Western academia is very limited and cannot fully understand zen, that's why new indigenized research

methods coming from our own country is urgently needed. In such discourse, researchers intend to point out that “Western research methodology” is incapable to study Buddhist psychology, a new set of methodology developed by Chinese researchers is needed. However, when the researchers presented their suggestions in the “indigenized research methods”, they tend to draw their reference from philosophical discussions instead of empirical data. So, despite the fact that such kind of discussion was started as early as 2009 (Peng and Yang, 2009: 3-6, 50) under the topic of zen, there is no new research method developed and accepted by the later researchers in China. For instance, Peng Yan-qin and Hu Hong-yun (2012) had suggested that “internal evidence” (Peng and Hu, 2012) should be a unique research method of Chinese psychologists. However, after 2012, there’s no researcher which takes their suggestion and works on his/her studies by adopting “internal evidence”. It is obvious that such views have a strong East–West dichotomy mindset. Regarding most existing research methods as “Western research methodology” and abandoning them leaves the researchers no choice but to continue focusing on theoretical discussions.

Although Taiwan and Hong Kong’s researchers are also involved in the discussion of indigenization of psychology, their discourse and attitude towards Western theories and research methods are not the same. It is true that one of the assumptions in the indigenization of psychology is not possible to fully understand the psychology of the people in a particular ethnic or any other social group without a complete understanding of the social, historical, political, ideological, and religious premises that have shaped people of this group (Shiraev, 2010: 21). However, indigenous psychology is still a branch of psychology studies which seek for understanding human behaviours and mental processes under the scientific paradigm (Kim and Young, 2006: 33). In the indigenous studies conducted by Taiwan and Hong Kong’s researchers, instead of holding an attitude of rejecting and looking down on Western research methodology, they tried to incorporate Western research methodology when conducting their own research.

As a brief summary, the above statistics and information show that there is an increasing trend for the studies of Buddhist Psychology. Although in both Western and Eastern academia, Buddhist Psychology is in a fast pace of development, the research interests are not the same. In the West, early researchers focused much on elaboration of the concepts and theories of Buddhist Psychology. The publications at that time were mostly theoretical in nature. As Buddhist Psychology continues to develop, two important trends appear. Researchers have shifted their focus on scientific investigation of Buddhist Psychology, and they also attempt to apply the ideas from Buddhism into psychotherapy. In the East, the development trend had become more complex. The research methodology adopted by the researchers and the

attitude towards Western research methodology become different between researchers from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. As a result, even up to now, the studies and publications of Buddhist psychology are still mainly focusing on theoretical discussions in the Chinese academia (especially in the studies from Mainland China). Another notable difference between West and East is the rising trend of leisure books about Buddhist Psychology. In the later parts of this paper, reasons behind such a unique phenomenon in the Mainland China academia will be discussed.

### **5. Analysis of some Common Characteristics in Chinese Writings**

After a comprehensive review about the literature in Chinese academia, there are two noticeable discourses among the researchers (especially in the researchers from Mainland China). The paragraphs below will take a closer look into their discourses. Firstly, they believe that Buddhism in itself is psychology. Secondly, they think that Buddhism is better than the Western psychology.

As early as in Liang Qi-chao's speech, he pointed out that Buddhism in itself is psychology without any hesitation. In his presentation "A Brief Inspection about Buddhist Psychology", he mentioned that:

If someone asks me: What is Dharma? I would not hesitate to answer: Psychology. (Liang, 2001: 394)

Try finding out what is pañca-skandha, what is Nidāna, what is Astādaśa dhātavaḥ, what is aṣṭa vijñānakāyāḥ, which one is not (a kind of) psychology? (Liang, 2001: 394)

Later, in 1988, Pu Yang-pu had the same discourse in "Buddhism and Psychology". In the article, he said that:

Buddhism is a special type of psychology which has the longest history. (Pu, 1988: 18)

This kind of discourse exists even in latest publications of recent years. In Sik Wei-hai's *Pañca-skandha Psychology*, the author claims that:

This kind of Sādhana (Buddhist life cultivation), from an objective viewpoint, is a cultivation of mind. Since it's a cultivation of mind, it is necessary to have adequate understanding about psychology, and equip with knowledge about psychology. (Sik, 2006: 1)

The same discourse also appears in Chen Bing's *Buddhist Psychology*. In the book, he clearly asserts that:

From contemporary transpersonal psychology, post-modern psychology, the main contents of Buddhism can be said as a kind of psychology. (Chen, 2015: 2)

As shown in the above, researchers from Mainland China do not only recognize Buddhism as a kind of psychology directly; more notably, they recognize it as a better kind of psychology. In Taixu's paper "Behaviourism and Psychology", he claimed that Buddhist Psychology could be divided into three branches, including the study of emotions, thoughts and intellect. He went further to criticize Western psychology (the focus of discussion in this paper is Behaviourism) was too narrow-minded (Sik, 2004: 216). The influence of Taixu's attitude and discourse towards Western psychology still exists nowadays. Even in the latest publication, the same kind of discourse appears. In a recently published Buddhist psychology book written by Wang Mi-qu, he often compares Buddhist Psychology with "General Psychology" and "Scientific Psychology". He claimed that Buddhist Psychology is much better among all. Comparatively speaking, Buddhist Psychology is "broad, in-depth, with great vision", and it is "capable in studying topics which scientific psychology finds difficult to inspect" (Wang 2014: 4).

By revealing the fact that Chinese Buddhist Psychology has discourses as such, they give us the cues to understand why the development of Buddhist Psychology is so different when compared with the West. In Mainland China academia, researchers do not only believe that Buddhism is psychology, but even more a better kind of psychology when compared with the Western and scientific one. With such belief, they tend to dig deeper into what wisdom Buddha's teachings can contribute to the further development of Buddhist psychology. This is one of the reasons why the publications focusing on philosophical and theoretical discussions continue to prevail till now. Furthermore, it is because researchers also tend to look down on scientific methods in studying psychology, they think that scientific methods cannot study people's mind as detailed as what the Buddha had revealed to us. That's why scientific and empirical studies are relatively weak in Mainland China academia when compared with the West. This explains the differences between West and East in the development of Buddhist Psychology.

## **6. A Discussion about such Phenomenon**

The differences between the West and the East are explained through studying the discourses of Chinese researchers. The next question is "why?" What causes the differences between West and East? Why did such kinds of discourse appear in Eastern academia (especially in Mainland China)? There are two main reasons.

### **6.1. Historical Reasons**

Checking the history of psychology, as Liang Qi-chao and Taixu introduced the concept of Buddhist Psychology, it was the era when Behaviourism

was becoming dominant in Western psychology. According to Brennan's *History and Systems of Psychology*, Behaviourism was increasingly more influential in the academia: This movement was formally initiated by an American psychologist, John Broadus Watson (1878-1958), in a famous paper, "Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It", published in 1913 (Brenan, 2003: 240). One of the key features of Behaviourism is that it focuses only on the study of observable behaviours: he (here means Watson) dismissed the entire notion of some nonphysical mental state consciousness as a pseudo-problem for science. In its place, Watson advocated overt, observable behaviour as the sole legitimate subject matter for a true science of psychology (Brenan, 2003: 240). No wonder, Liang and Taixu criticized Western psychology as "narrow-minded" and believed that Western psychology was unable to study all the Buddha's teachings about mind.

This only explains the phenomenon which happened in times of Liang Qi-chao and Taixu, but not the differences between Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Yet, such differences can also be understood by historical reason. If we check the history of psychology after it arrived in China, we are able to understand the differences between these three regions. With reference to two articles written by Yang Guo-shu in 1993 and 2008 (Yang 1993; 2008), there were different development paces in these three regions. When psychology first came to Asia, this newly arrived discipline focused on the introduction of Western theories and concepts and translation of Western works, e.g. William James (1842-1910), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), John Dewey (1859-1952), etc. Later, it is because of social and political instability, the development of psychology in Mainland China was lagged behind. In the mid-1930s, almost all academic activities ceased because of the Sino-Japanese war and civil wars.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the advancement of psychology was resumed in Mainland China. However, unlike the development in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the advancement of psychology in Mainland China was modelled on the Soviet Union's. It was because of the ideological difference, psychology development in Mainland China took Marxist dialectical materialism as its guiding principle. Thus, Mainland China researchers at that time regarded psychology as "Western oriented" or more specifically "American oriented" and developed a rejecting attitude to "American psychology". Later afterwards, during the 10 years of Cultural Revolution, psychology was even being regarded as pseudoscience and all psychological studies were banned at that period. Such kind of ideological, political and social background did not happen in Taiwan and Hong Kong. This explains why there are some noticeable differences between Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong in the study of Buddhist psychology at the moment.

## 6.2. Attempts to Regain Recognition and Esteem

Reviewing the history of psychology, this discipline has had great advancement within these decades. After the rise of Behaviourism, Humanistic psychology became the Third Force of psychology. Psychologists have put more focus on studying the healthy side of individuals. Different ideas flourish in the field, including cognitive psychology, transpersonal psychology, positive psychology, etc. Psychology has also got much improvement on research methodology. Observation of overt behaviours and experimental design are no more the only choices for research. Psychology has more sophisticated research methods for researchers to choose, including quantitative approaches, qualitative approaches and even mixed methods. Why do the researchers in Chinese academia still stick to the same discourse with the two founders who lived a hundred years ago? It is not reasonable to say that they do not know the present progress of psychology. A possible explanation for the present phenomenon is, they know the advancement of psychology in the West, they still look down on Western psychology because it is a means for them to get recognition. Especially when we talk about the research and studies in Mainland China. Since the progression and advancement in psychology studies had been hindered because of the social and political instabilities in the last century, this urges the researchers to gain back their status and recognition. Furthermore, as Mainland China has been gaining great advancements in other aspects (e.g. economic aspect, political aspect, international relationship, etc.), the researchers will feel more pressure when compared with the West.

With reference to Wallerstein I., Wang Qi has depicted crisis that may happen in the indigenized process of researches. Researchers who believe themselves as peripheral and inferior than the West. In their researches, it is often found that they may try to regain recognition and esteem from discourse as such: “what the Western tradition has, our tradition also has such” (Wang, 2014: 14-16). This kind of discourse exists in the study of Buddhist Psychology in China. For instance, Sik Wei-hai believed that Zen Buddhism and Jnana yoga are equivalent to Transpersonal psychology in the West (Sik, 2006: 911); Wang Mi-qu claimed that “Buddhist breathing exercises” as a kind of behavioural therapy (Wang, 2014: 7). Another example is in Chen Bing’s *Buddhist Psychology*, he just put the labels from Western psychology onto the concepts from Buddhism and claims that they are exactly the same. In his book, he claimed that “developing Bodhicitta is logotherapy”, “learning Buddha’s teachings is rational emotive therapy”, “holding precepts is behavioural therapy”, etc. (Chen, 2015: 719).

To be brief, with the support of historical investigation and Wang Qi’s description about the indigenized process and possible crisis, this explains why researchers from Mainland China academia have the discourse that

Buddhism is a better kind of psychology when compared with the West even in today, and why publications mainly focus on philosophical and theoretical discussions but not scientific and empirical explorations. This paper does not intend to obliterate the contributions of existing studies. Philosophical and theoretical discussions are also very important in the development of Buddhist psychology. Without the extraction of Buddha's wisdom from the Scriptures and without establishing solid philosophical foundations, the development of Buddhist psychology is not a possible mission. This is exactly the tradition left down by Liang Qi-chao and Master Taixu. Revealing the existing literature, researchers from Mainland China have been working hard in following this tradition. A suggestion for their future research direction is: more empirical studies are needed in the future in order to verify what they have proposed in their previous studies. One immediate way to achieve this is by initiating interdisciplinary research between Buddhist studies and psychology studies. For long-term development, researchers can also facilitate more communication and exchange of experiences between academics from different parts of Asia.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper intends to review the development of Buddhist Psychology systematically. The development of "Buddhist psychology" is an interesting topic worth studying from which we can see the process of indigenization. In the past, the new arrival of psychology was not welcome in China and was being looked down upon. Early in 1922, Sik Taixu and Liang Qi-chao claimed that "Buddhism in itself is psychology", and even more, a better one when comparing with Western psychology. With great advancement throughout these decades, present Mainland Chinese researcher of Buddhist Psychology still tend to look down on the empirical spirit of modern psychology and also the research methodology of social science.

With reference to historical reasons and Wang Qi's description about the indigenized process and possible crisis, it seems to be a possible explanation that the present researchers are trying to regain recognition and esteem from discourse as such: "what the Western psychology has, Buddhist Psychology also has such; furthermore, we have the better one." This also explains why the trends and changes of research interests between the West and the East are different, with the former one having increasing publications on scientific and empirical studies, and the latter one still focusing on philosophical and theoretical discussions.

This paper does not intend to obliterate the contributions of existing philosophical and theoretical studies. They have great contributions in laying down solid theoretical foundation for future studies. However, the point

here is, over-emphasizing theoretical studies is not an ideal development for Buddhist psychology. More empirical studies are urgently needed. Initiating interdisciplinary research between Buddhist studies and psychology studies, facilitating exchange of experiences between academics from different parts of Asia are the suggestions for future directions.

## Notes

- \* Dr Poon received his PhD in Chu Hai University. With a multidisciplinary education background, he is interested in studying art and literature from a psychological perspective. He is currently studying another PhD in the University of Edinburgh which specializes in studying the relationship between reading and mental health. Also, he has a keen interest in studying Humanistic Buddhism and is the author of the book *A reflection upon the development of Buddhist psychology in East Asia* (in Chinese) which is one of the deliverables of a research project funded by the Chinese University of Hong Kong – Centre for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism.
- 1. R.J. Gerrig, (2013: 5-7) in his *Psychology and Life* used the phrase “the evolution of modern psychology” to describe the development of psychology from a discipline in philosophy to a science of mind and behaviour.

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