From a stranger to Community Immersed Ally: A Confucian approach to allyship

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From a stranger to a 'one-of-us' ally: A new Confucian approach to community allyship

Abstract

Promoting social inclusion and supporting positive outcomes for marginalised groups through allyship has been a persistent feature of community-orientated psychological theories. Central to such works are mutually beneficial relationships between scholarly activists and communities. In considering such collaborations, the relevance of the Confucian concept of *Ren* (benevolent, human-heartedness) to allyship is clear. This approach features a Chinese form of relationalism, which involves transitions across different levels of interpersonal relations. From this perspective, establishing allyship involves a process whereby scholar activists' transition from being a stranger to a one-of-us community participant. This transition is exemplified through reflections on a reciprocal collaboration between the first author and the Townsville Chinese Club. In theorising this example of allyship from a Confucian standpoint, we highlight the importance of understanding and enacting cultural nuances for establishing ethical and effective allyship in contemporary multicultural societies.

Key words: Allyship, community, *Ren*, benevolent leadership, Chinese relationalism, Chinese social orientation

Introduction

Research in psychology is often characterised by distant relationships between 'researchers' and the 'researched' (Li & Forbes 2018). In part, this is because researchers are predominately trained to embrace notions of objectivity and to avoid 'bias' by maintaining distance from the communities being subjected to research. Many marginalised communities have questioned such outsider-driven research practices, and have become actively involved in their own knowledge production practices (Rua et al. in press). There is a recent trend in which academics are subject to increased scrutiny regarding the impact of their research. This has led to a prominence of more immersive and participative approaches. Discussions have ensued regarding issues of allyship and scholar activism whereby intellectuals work collaboratively with community groups to co-design, co-conduct, co-report, and co-implement research (Boursier 2017; Forber-Pratt, Mueller & Andrews 2019). In this article, an effort to bridge the artificial distance between scholars and a Chinese community group in Australia is discussed. The relationship is characterised by human-heartedness, reciprocity, benevolent leadership, capacity building, and knowledge exchange.

Participative and engaged research approaches have fluctuated in the discipline of psychology since the early decades of the 20th century (Hodgetts et al. 2020; O'Doherty & Hodgetts 2019). For example, Dewey (1916) developed a form of knowledge co-production based on 'experimentalism' that was anchored in what he saw as democratic relationships. Dewey (1969/1991) believed that scholars ought to function as activists who work *with* community partners through meaningful associations, sustained interactions, and a shared ethos to transform adverse social realities in ways that benefit scholars and community members alike. Likewise, Jahoda (1992) stressed the need for scholar activists to 'immerse' themselves within communities in order to conduct research *with* rather than *on* communities.

This approach is used as a means of developing knowledge of manifestation of social issues in actual people's lives and how scholars might best respond.

The importance of such allyship returned to prominence in psychology with the social justice and liberation movements of the 1960s. Work during this period featured a diverse range of supportive relationships, including male allies within feminist movements, white allies within racial equality movements, and straight allies within LGBTQI movements (Mizock & Page 2016; Washington & Evans 1991). It has also extended to the efforts of scholar activists to help improve the situations of marginalised indigenous, migrant, worker, religious, and mental health service survivors (Scholz et al. 2019; Boursier 2017; Erskine & Bilimoria 2019). The resulting allied scholar activism offers a useful context for more contemporary developments.

This paper conceptualises 'allies' as scholar activists who are from both privileged and marginalised groups and who work collaboratively *with* oppressed communities to address their needs (Broido 2000; Washington & Evans 1991). In keeping with the approaches of Dewey, Jahoda, and others, we approach scholar activism as encompassing engagements in politically motivated and action-orientated research. The allyship that is central to such scholar activism involves partnerships *with* communities in the co-creation of actionable knowledge that supports positive outcomes (Said 1994). Allyship is shaped by values of reciprocal cooperation, benevolence, and collective action for the benefit of marginalised groups (Beauchamp 2019). This is reflected in allied scholar activism in the Chinese community in which the Confucian concept of *Ren* (仁) is used as a guide.

Ren is regarded as the highest level of human moral development in Chinese culture (Li & He, 2018). There are various English translations of *Ren*, which all embrace the principle of ethical virtue (Wong, 2018). These translations feature concepts such as benevolence,

compassion, virtue, goodness, human-heartedness, and humanness (Wang, 2012). All convey the essence of *Ren* as a particular moral virtue requiring care and respect towards others (Hwang, 2012). According to Confucian ethics, scholars ought to function as activists who enact the moral virtue of *Ren* by engaging with communities benevolently and with compassion (Hwang, 2012).

Despite psychology's long history of scholar activism, no existing scholarly accounts of the establishment of allyship within contemporary Chinese communities in countries such as Australia could be found. In providing one such account, we articulate why and how the first author engaged in allyship with one such community in order to help promote social participation and inclusion. We begin with an exploration of the Confucian basis for the current approach to allyship. What follows is a consideration of how this approach informs the establishment of allyship with the community from a Confucian scholar activist viewpoint. The third section considers how the establishment of this allyship was useful in engaging participative, action-orientated research both within the Chinese community and other traditionally marginalised ethnic minority groups. In theorising and exemplifying an approach to community-immersed allyship, the importance of cultural understanding, fluency, and ways of being for ethical and effective allyship is highlighted.

Cultural philosophical underpinnings of allyship: *Ren*

Founded by Confucius (551–479 BC), Confucianism is an indigenous Chinese philosophy that focuses on addressing the practicalities of human ethical and social relations. Central to Confucianism is the assumption that human nature is fundamentally good (Li & He, 2018) and is the transcendental foundation of the self-disciplined morality of *Ren* (Yeh, 2010). Where the concept of *free will* is prominent in much of European moral philosophy, *Ren* is the most significant guiding value in Confucian moral philosophy (Liu 2017). The Confucian work

of the *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong;* 中庸*)* posits that "[b]enevolence (*Ren*) is the characteristic attribute of personhood. The first priority of its expression is showing affection to those closely related to us" (Cited in Hwang, 2018, p.187). For Confucians, *Ren* requires a good person to love and respect others, engage in dutifulness, exchange gratitude, demonstrate loyalty, and act benevolently and with humility towards others, particularly those who are less fortunate (Hwang, 2012; Liu, 2017).

Confucians posit that there are five cardinal ethics (*Wu Lun;* 五伦), which surround the fundamental Confucian value of *Ren*, for the five major dyadic relationships in Chinese culture: affective closeness for father-son relationships; righteousness for sovereign-subordinate; distinction for husband-wife; proper order for older-younger brothers; and trustworthiness for friends (Liu et al., 2010). These five cardinal ethics with the fundamental Confucian value of *Ren* are the ruling principles to fulfil social role obligations in the five significant dyadic relationships (Hwang, 2018). To achieve the five cardinal ethics and fulfil higher-ordained destinies, Confucianism advocates that people must cultivate the moral self with *Ren Dao* (仁道), the way of *Ren* (Hwang, 2012). As Liu and MacDonald (2016) pointed out, *Ren* promotes enhancement of the self to the moral self, but also enhancement of others. The essence of *Ren* is to morally realise the extent that a person commits to help others to reach their goals of moral self-cultivation. Thus, *Ren* can guide scholars to help benefit other people and the world. Accordingly, scholars have an important role to play in promoting and cultivating the virtues of *Ren* within themselves and others, and for the benefit of humanity. The greater the degree to which a scholar exercises *Ren Dao*, the higher moral level at which the scholar is thought to be performing (Hwang, 2012). As such, the Confucian concept of *Ren* offers a moral foundation for contemporary Chinese scholar activists and Chinese community allyship.

The ideographic Chinese character of *Ren* (仁) is composed of two other characters: '*Ren*' (person; 人) on the left and '*Er*' (two; 二) on the right. The two-person ideograph of *Ren* implies a desired societal formation for sharing goodness and spreading humaneness (Smith, 1987). This interconnected, relational feature of *Ren* reflects the theory of Chinese social orientation (K. S. Yang, 1999), which is concerned with "a person's tendency to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with, and emerge into, the surroundings so that collective and social relational goals can be effectively achieved" (K. S. Yang, 1999, p. 194). Correspondingly, the Confucian self is conceptualised in-relation to others and through a series of obligations between people in different relationships (Ho et al., 2001). These obligations also vary with regards to the levels of familiarity that characterise different relationships. It is the enactment of these different relationships in accordance with different levels of familiarity that make up the relational webs that are foundational to Confucian society (Liu et al., 2010). This relational orientation to social interaction that features different levels of familiarity has been developed into a theory of Chinese relationalism (Yeh, 2010).

The theory of Chinese relationalism that informs the understanding of Chinese community allyship can be dated back to the prominent Chinese sociologist Xiao Tong Fei and his Differential Mode of Association (Fei, 1992). According to Fei, each Chinese person is positioned in the centre of a number of concentric relational circles. The circles represent a horizontal social network, which feature varying distances between the person and others with whom they have social relationships. The closeness of the associations between the person at the centre and different persons in the network is reflected in the distance between the respective circles from the centre. The shorter the distance, the closer the relationship. Chinese people employ different rules of interaction with people who are in different circles of the network and located at different social distances.

In elaborating on Fei's 1992 framework for Chinese interpersonal relations, K. S. Yang (1995) suggested three meaningfully relational categories that are distinguished by differing levels of social distance and familiarity. These categories designate a person or group's insider (one of us) or outsider status, and are: *Shengren* (stranger or one outside of us; 生人); *Shuren* (acquaintance or more distant insider; 熟人); and *Jiaren* (family member or close insider; 家人). Relationships with insiders are socially and psychologically closer than those with outsiders (Li & Forbes, 2018). Although *Jiaren* and *Shuren* are both regarded as insiders, they are distinguished as *Jiaren* relationships being strictly based on blood relations. According to K. S. Yang (1981, 1995), the different levels of proximity and meanings of the relationships with *Shengren, Shuren,* and *Jiaren* are articulated in distinctive interaction modes between the persons and the groups they embody. *Shengren* relationships feature self-interest and distance, and often involves people calculating the potential gains and losses to the self from any interactions. *Shuren* relationships consider both utilitarian and affectional factors, and feature moderate levels of reciprocity. The principles of love and responsibility that are central to *Ren* are applied most intensely within *Jiaren* relationships that are socially and emotionally closer, ideally unconditional and interdependent, and feature increased levels of reciprocity. *Jiaren* do not expect any return for a particular act of support to another *Jiaren*, but rather maintain the expectation that support and protection will be forthcoming from another they have helped previously.

Unlike the evolving feature between *Shengren* and *Shuren* (e.g., *Shengren* can become *Shuren* through ongoing positive social interactions while *Shuren* can turn into *Shengren* as a result of lack of or negative social interactions), *Jiaren* applies only to family relationships and cannot be changed through accumulated personal interaction. In her study on the classification of Chinese relationships, Y. Yang (2001) pointed out that in contemporary Chinese society, the

Jiaren relationship may have become less central to Chinese relations compared to it was in traditional Chinese agricultural society. Applying Fei's (1992) Differential Mode of Association to the contemporary social context, Y. Yang (2001) employed the term *Zijiren* (自己人) to demonstrate the unique classification of Chinese relations. *Zijiren* literally refers to 'one of us', which features the feeling of closeness and love, interpersonal attractiveness and trust, and responsibilities for one another that was traditionally reserved for *Jiaren* relationships. Sometimes the closeness, love, attractiveness, trust, and responsibilities between *Zijiren* exceed those in blood-bound *Jiaren* relationship in K. S. Yang's (1981, 1995) model (Y. Yang, 2001).

Built upon the understanding of social exchange in Chinese society, Hwang (1987) developed the Face and Favour model to make sense of the deep structure of Chinese relationalism. In this model, Hwang defined the two interactional parties as the petitioner and the resource allocator. When a petitioner requests the resource allocator to allocate a social resource to benefit the petitioner, the resource allocator makes a decision based on the degree of closeness they experience in the relationship. Three categories are used to classify the relationship: the expressive tie, the instrumental tie, and the mixed tie. According to Hwang (1987, 2006, 2012), the expressive tie represents a relatively permanent and stable relationship that features feelings of affection, warmth, safety, and attachment. This relationship tie, where instrumental support or material resources are established based on affective feelings, is mainly established among family members, close relatives, and close friends. In opposition to the expressive tie, the instrumental tie is an unstable and temporary relationship, functioning as a means or an instrument to reach specific goals. A mixed tie is a relationship that occurs among people who simply know each other, such as neighbours, classmates, colleagues, teachers, and students. Unlike the long lasting and temporary features in the expressive and instrumental ties, the duration of the mixed tie relationship is dependent on continuous interactions between the two parties.

Drawing on insights from K.S. Yang's (1981, 1995), Hwang's (1987, 2006, 2012) and Y. Yang's (2001) categories of Chinese relationships, we propose *Shengren* (stranger), *Shuren* (acquaintance), and *Zijiren* (one of us) as three primary categories of interpersonal relationships in contemporary Chinese society that are foundational to allied scholar activism. We also associate instrumental ties as featuring primarily between *Shengren*, the mixed tie between *Shuren*, and the expressive tie between *Zijiren*. Across these varying types of Chinese relationships, *Ren* is one of the guiding Confucian ethics that regulate the social interactions when people exercise *Ren Dao* in a variety of interpersonal relationships (Hwang, 2012).

One of the exercises of *Ren Dao* is benevolent leadership, which features considerable concern for the wellbeing of subordinate persons and groups (Cheng et al. 2004). Within a Confucian system, benevolent leadership also features reciprocal, but unequal role obligations in relationships between the leader and the led. The leader regards subordinates as family members in many ways and acts accordingly with benevolent understanding and forgiveness. In return, subordinates reciprocate by showing respect and gratitude towards the leader (Cheng et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2010). Benevolent leadership is widely practised in contemporary Chinese society, particularly in small organisations (Liu et al., 2010) such as community groups. This Confucian leadership style is also evolving in response to changing societal circumstances, such as when Chinese people adjust to life in such countries as Australia. What follows is a recount from the perspective of *Ren* and Chinese relationalism of how the first author transitioned from being a *Shengren* to *Shuren* and then *Zijiren* (stranger to acquaintance, to one-of-us), and as such a highly familiar allied scholar activist within the Chinese community of Townsville.

The Townsville Chinese community: Moving from being a stranger to a one-of-us ally

Townsville is a medium-sized, regional city in north Queensland, Australia. In 2016, Townsville had a population of 229,031, of which 2,887 people identified as having Chinese ancestry. Among this population, 1,401 had both parents born overseas and 1,172 had both parents born in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). At the centre of this population group is the Townsville Chinese Club (hereafter the Club), which was established in 1969 in the context of a restrictive migration policy (namely, the White Australia Policy). The discriminatory White Australia Policy had a profound impact on Chinese people who were forced to conform, at least outwardly, to the model minority stereotype of being quiet, problem free, hard-working, and willing to assimilate into anglo-Australian culture (Kiang et al. 2017). Although a more inclusive and humane multicultural policy was introduced in 1973, Chinese people were still positioned as outsiders and treated with suspicion by many Anglo-Saxon Northern Queenslanders (Li & Jackson 2015). Despite the initially hostile societal context, the Club offered an enclave for Chinese people to support each other and to establish positive working relationships with other community groups, educational institutions, and civic entities. The Club offered a purposefully low-profile and self-restrained community focal point for Chinese people to engage with others without attracting undue attention to themselves, risking further discrimination or racial attacks. As the Club grew, a core aim became the fostering of multicultural harmony, intergroup understanding, and increased appreciation of cultural diversity in Townville (The Townville Chinese Club, 2015).

When the first author joined the Club and committee in 2012 she was regarded by the founding members as a stranger, or *Shengren*. At the time, these members were hyper-vigilant regarding the first author's interactions with club members and contributions to the committee. There were a number of factors contributing to the committee being wary of the first author and holding her at some social distance. Firstly, as a younger person and an academic working at a university, the first author had higher social status than other committee members. This

manifested in concerns about her sincerity and reliability within the Club. Second, the first author had only arrived in Townsville in recent months and had limited familiarity with Club members. As is common to Chinese relational practices, the first author was a member of the Club and committee but was not yet considered to be an insider.

This *Shengren* status was evident in subsequent conversations between the first author and the Club's committee members after she helped the Club successfully apply for several grants. The following are extracts from the first author's diary at the time: "Soon after I joined the Club in 2012, I suggested applying for grants, but no response from the committee. Why?" Some committee members said, "We didn't know you at that moment. We were unsure what we would get from working with you on grant applications." Another added:

> "Before you we had approached several academics and asked for help from them. Some told us they didn't have time. Some came for a short while and disappeared. We felt that they didn't want to work with us and work for the community. We thought you were one of them."

The conversations indicate that the first author was then regarded as a stranger by other committee members. The inaction from the community reflects Hwang's (1987) instrumental relationship where Chinese people tend to behave cautiously when they interact with strangers.

In 2014, the Club faced financial difficulties and was at risk of disbanding. The first author again suggested that the Club should apply for local government funding to organise Chinese New Year celebrations and in doing so to make a more overt contribution to multicultural life in the city. This initiative was intended to raise the profile of the Club and the community it represented. This was in contrast to the previous low-profile strategy that had meant that the Club remained socially distant from other ethnic groups in the city. During the initial discussions regarding these issues, founding Club members reiterated their concerns that

greater public exposure of the Club might attract unwanted attention and increase the risk of racial attacks against Chinese people. This concern reflected their past experiences and how in ethnically hostile migration situations many minority groups practice self-censorship and refrain from engaging with host communities in order to avoid further racism and hostility (Ninh, 2014). The first author persuaded the founding Club members that the broader community had evolved, and could appreciate the Club's cultural contribution to celebrating diversity in the city. The Club accepted the first author's proposal and a successful grant application was submitted to the Townville City Council. The Club then organised three celebration events in the 2015 Chinese New Year, which attracted very positive attention from local media and residents (Figure 1). The success of these initial Chinese New Year events were successfully repeated in subsequent years to the point that many white Australians took an active interest. Some even performed in the lions depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Media report by Townsville Bulletin published on the 20th February 2015

The demonstrated organisational skills of the first author, the related success of the events described above, and the subsequent breaking down of some of the barriers between the Chinese and host communities facilitated her transition into the second acquaintance or *Shuren* category of Chinese relationships. At the *Shuren* stage, the community knew the first author who was now embroiled within the dynamics of mixed-tie relationships within the community. As stated by Hwang (2012), at this stage both parties demonstrated instrumental and expressive elements in their relationships. For example, the first author invited some committee members to *Yumcha* (a Chinese tradition of morning tea or brunch in a restaurant involving drinking Chinese tea and eating dim sum) so as to establish the expressive tie. In other words, the instrumental tie through activities such as Yumcha at the *Shuren* stage was established for the purpose of building the expressive tie and often initiated by the first author.

The first author continued working closely with the community and noticed that many committee members began to regularly offer instrumental support to her. For example, the committee members looked after the first author's cats and watered her garden when she was away from home and offered her home-made Chinese food upon her return. Such instrumental exchanges were markers of growing mutual respect, familiarity, and affection; and would not have occurred in the absence of growing affective ties between these committee members and the first author. The committee members acted as if it was their responsibility to reciprocate for the first author's contributions to the community by looking after her. As a committee member stated: "This is what we can do to repay your kindness and wonderful job for our community. We like you and are grateful to have you with us." The intertwining of affective and instrumental components in interpersonal relations is a strong indicator of *Zijiren* relationships (Y. Yang, 2007). The voluntary reciprocity and accumulated authentic affection

on a regular basis marks the transition of relationships from *Shuren* to *Zijiren*. It is important to point out that the meaning of the instrumental tie at the *Zijiren* stage is different from that of the *Shuren* stage. The instrumental component here is not for building the expressive tie but as a means to express the authentic affection from the community to the first author.

The energy and time the first author invested into the community, and the success of cultural outreach events and grant applications placed her in the position of a trustworthy benevolent leader. As proposed by Yang (1995), once Chinese people regard a figure to be trustworthy and of high status, they consider this person to be an authority figure and are more likely to follow that person. This was evident in the committee members expressing their willingness to follow the first author as a *Zijiren* and to accept her growing leadership role in the community. In order to promote the sustainability of the community development, the first author encouraged the Club to move further towards an allyship stage at which the community took the leading role to achieve community goals. In the discussion of this movement, the committee members expressed their concerns if the first author would continue to be *Zijiren* of the community. After receiving the assurance from the first author, the committee members were excited about moving to *Zijiren* allyship, namely, one-of-us allyship, a concept co-produced by the scholar activist and the community. It is noticeable that *Zijiren* allyship is a hybrid concept that reflects both Chinese and Western perspectives. Although the existing literature on allyship largely focuses on advantaged group members helping disadvantaged groups, there is evidence that similarities between allies and the community can result in greater cooperation and support across group boundaries (Louis et al., 2019). This is reflective in the Chinese *Zijiren* concept which advocates that similarities and familiarity can increase benevolent helping.

To enact the one-of-us allyship, the first author utilised her professional skills to mentor the committee members to write grant applications. Encouraged by the success of several small grant applications, the committee put their new skills to work on further collaborative efforts to gain resources to install solar panels and air conditioners to improve the Club environment. These additions to the building were important for ensuring an adequate environment for the new senior and children's programs, which were also being developed and hosted in the Club's building.

The relational transitions that were occurring for the first author led her to being repositioned as a community ally and leader whose actions reflected those of the Confucian scholar activist. Such Chinese allied scholar activists embrace the ethical imperatives of *Ren*, and enacts a distributive form of benevolent leadership. Central to this leadership style is caring for the community through the creation of opportunities, such as working on grant proposals collaboratively with the Club, for Club members to grow and realise their own potential. The cultivation of such benevolent leadership and one-of-us allyship is essential for establishing the foundations for action-oriented research projects.

Before we consider such research in the next section, we briefly summarise the first author's transition from the stranger to the allied scholar activist. This transition is depicted in simplified terms in Figure 2. When considering Figure 2, it is important to note that this transition was not strictly linear in actuality. Rather, the transition to one-of-us allyship should be seen as an evolving process that required considerable effort to build and maintain more intimate relationships. Furthermore, such transitions rely not only on what might be termed intimate or close collegial relationships, but also on the reciprocal expressive ties that are deeply embedded in Chinese culture. As such, community relationships come first and research

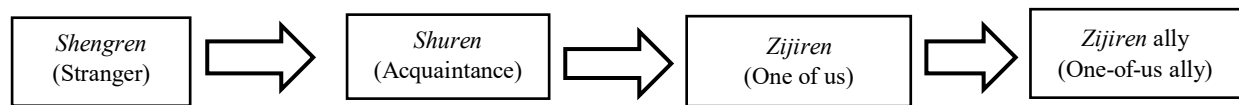becomes a secondary activity that is enabled because of the prior establishment of one-of-us allyship.

| Shengren (Stranger) | → | Shuren (Acquaintance) | → | Zijiren (One of us) | → | Zijiren ally (One-of-us ally) |

Figure 2. The evolving process of Chinese allyship

Conducting research with communities as an immersed scholar activist and ally

When scholar activists work in accordance with the expectations of *Ren* and cultivate benevolent leadership, on-of-us allyship can be enacted within Chinese communities. Both scholar allies and community members are repositioned together as part of a dynamic whole from which they can share their collective resources and engage in the co-production of knowledge. In the present case, the Chinese Club with the support from the allied scholar activist became an emerging new centre that provided leadership to the Chinese community and an organisational structure from which club members could collaborate with people from other minority communities in the city. These external relationships are evident in minority communities within the city now engaging in joint activities that are often coordinated by the Chinese Club. The core intention was to foster more familiar relationships with other ethnic populations as a means of embracing multiculturalism in Townsville.

The joint activities in this regard have created considerable positive media coverage whereby from 2015 to 2019 there were over 100 news reports on the activities. These activities have also offered platforms in which minority group members can strengthen their ties with each other, and members of the white community. For example, the 2018 Chinese Moon

Festival Carnival attracted large crowds of local residents (see Figure 3) and offered numerous opportunities for dialogue, cultural exchange, and increased understanding and respect.

Figure 3. Audience in the Townsville 2018 Chinese Moon Festival Carnival watching cultural performances (Source: https://www.facebook.com/tsvchinese/)

In addition to coordinating such events, the Club became actively involved in fostering knowledge production and application initiatives to document and offer responses to problems faced by ethnic-minority communities in the city. Before considering the Club's involvement in community action-orientated research with other community groups, a brief outline is provided of an evidence-based initiative that was conducted within the Chinese community. As a recognised scholarly ally, the first author was engaged in a conversation within the Club

committee regarding concerns about the need to support positive ageing and mental health with seniors in the community. From these initial discussions, the first author then developed and delivered evidence-based seminars on healthy ageing and art therapy in the context of promoting positive ageing and health. The seminars resulted in further conversations that led to the Club initiating an *Art in Healthy Ageing* program. The program was designed by the Club's Treasurer and involves weekly activities for senior community members who come together to sing, dance, make handicrafts, sew, and paint (Figure 4). The program provides seniors with a place where they can meet, develop, and maintain friendships. The supportive environment acts as a protective factor against the social exclusion, stress, anxiety, and negative emotions that are often associated with ageing in a foreign land (Li 2013).

Figure 4. The Club's *Art in Healthy Ageing* Project (Source: https://www.facebook.com/tsvchinese/)

Because of the efforts to build ties between the Chinese community and broader community, the program is supported by grants from the Townsville Airport. In 2018, with support from the first author, the Club members worked to plan, conduct, and analyse a small community-based evaluation of the program. This led to the development of a presentation to disseminate the qualitative research, which was delivered by the founding President of the Club, Dr Joe Leong, at the *Townsville Community Wellbeing Matters Forum*. Drawing on the concept of 'sense of community' (Li, Hodgetts & Sonn 2014), Dr Leong concluded that the program had been highly successful in strengthening bonds between seniors and for cultivating a sense of 'we-ness' or shared social identity among participating community members who subsequently engaged in a number of activities to support and help one another. This small research project constituted an initial step by the first author and Club committee members towards developing research skills within the community. It provided an opportunity for Club members to become involved in developing, resourcing, running, and evaluating a program to support a vulnerable group within the community.

Once Club members had become familiar with participative research processes, the Club was in a position to share these skills with other ethnic minority community groups in the city. This led to the Club working inclusively with the refugee, Islamic, Indian, and Pasifika community groups on small research projects. The initial projects involved these groups documenting their experiences of, and the need for, more coordinated responses to the recent one-in-500-year flood in Townsville in February 2019. As part of these projects, the Club coordinated an intercultural community forum entitled *Community Resilience and Unity in Disasters*. This forum offered a space in which the different groups could share and discuss their projects as part of a *Positive Psychology Conference* at James Cook University in June 2019. This event resulted in positive intercultural dialogues that also included city councillors and people from the majority white community of Townsville. The second author of this article,

who is the Club Secretary, led the planning, organising, and facilitation of the forum with support from the first author. The working group for this event was also comprised of representatives from participating minority group. Financial support for the event was provided by a successful grant application to the Townsville Mayor's Community Assistance Fund.

The forum and presentations were well received and covered by various news outlets. The forum was also recognised as yet another example of growing engagement and dialogue between ethnic communities, which contributed to the cultivation of mutual understanding and multiculturalism in the city. For example, the leader of the Islamic community stood and praised the leadership of the Club and the way in which the Club worked with scholars such as the first author. He also praised the forum for offering a platform for communities to share their concerns and work towards strengthening social ties between often marginalised minority groups and with the majority white community in Townsville.

These research projects would not have occurred if the one-of-us allyship in accord with Confucian ethical principle of *Ren* and Chinese relationalism had not developed. The one-of-us allyship indicates that good community leadership is not about exercising power over others, but rather is about participating with benevolence in shared endeavours *with* others. It is also about sharing expertise, growing capacity, and contributing to the positive direction that the community is moving in. From this Confucian-based perspective on allyship, researchers become resources and support workers for community initiatives that are anchored in and draw strength from relational interconnectedness. The events and research projects outlined above reflect the core task of scholar activist allies in promoting social inclusion, social change, and sustainability in community settings. The results of such allyship are more resilient, through which communities are able to engage in knowledge production on their own collective terms and to present their own insights and possible responses to issues of concern. In other words,

culturally-informed allyship can render community-initiated research more ethical, less exploitative, and more inclusive and effective.

Discussion

In contrast to research in psychology that is generally characterised by distant relationships between 'researcher' and the 'researched', this article offers an alternative, participative, and culturally-textured way of conducting research *with* communities. This involves developing practical strategies for working ethically as allies, and engaging community members in the preparation, design, implementation, and dissemination of research that responds to actual community interests and needs. Rather than simply outline a Confucian-based theoretical framework for immersive allied scholar activism, we have grounded the conceptual approach by reflecting on the first author's efforts to bridge the artificial distance between scholars and community groups. In doing so, we have demonstrated how such work is characterised by reciprocity, mutual benefit, resource acquisition, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and collective action. The importance of scholar activists engaging in allyship in ways that mesh with the cultural ways of being and relationalism that are germane to the community has been highlighted.

In this paper we have attempted to strike a balance between explaining Confucian scholar activism; the relationalism and ethical principles that underlie allyship; and a demonstration of how the first author acted as an ally within her local community. The intended balance lies between providing sufficient information on the Confucian orientation that underlies the first author's orientation to community psychology, and not losing sight of the actual participative actions within which she was immersed with community members. The Confucian approach to community allyship that has been presented is also important in

reminding psychologists of the obligation to build meaningful, familiar, and mutually beneficial relationships during research. It also provides a different cultural lens for understanding contemporary participative action research in Chinese settings.

As has been shown, the one-of-us allyship is grounded through the first author's work with the community. It promotes a new Confucian approach to Chinese community allyship that moves beyond the traditional hierarchy of *Shengren-Shuren-Zijiren* (stranger–acquaintance–one-of-us) model in Confucian relationalism to a one-of-us allyship stage featuring immersed community participation and collaboration built upon *Zijiren* relationship. The hybrid concept of *Zijiren* allyship challenges the traditional East-West dichotomy model that separates the Eastern and Western cultures. This dichotomy model sees culture as a fixed entity and ignores hybridity (Li, 2013). Our work theoretically contributes to the research of the psychology of culture. More specifically, when groups of individuals of different cultures (e.g., Western and Eastern cultures) come into continuous contact, these cultures co-create one another and come into being at the same time. As such, the West is in the East and the East is in the West (Li, Hodgetts, & Chhabra, 2019).

The concept of *Ren* and Chinese relationalism offer useful constructs for understanding the ethics of allyship for immersed scholar activists in Chinese community settings. By engaging in *Ren Dao,* scholar activists can support the cultivation of *Ren* both within themselves and others. From this perspective, it is the role of allied scholar activists to help grow good people who are willing and able to, in turn, help grow others. These positive implications of *Ren* can be understood metaphorically in relation to the ripples from a stone tossed into a pond (Hourdequin, 2010). The effects of self-cultivated *Ren* extend infinitely outwards in concentric circles of benevolence that impact the lives of others in positive ways.

This metaphor also speaks to an approach to effective allyship that is fundamentally relational and relies on scholar activists transitioning from strangers to immersed community participants.

Our analysis has also demonstrated that interpersonal emotions are central to distinguishing between an instrumental or mixed tie, and an expressive tie. The interpersonal emotions attached to *Ren* (love, mutual exchange of gratitude, respect, loyalty, and affection) are central to *Zijiren* and to Confucian allyship. This emotional attachment between the ally and the community is largely omitted in Western theory on allyship that places more emphasis on the outcome of allyship (Boursier, 2017; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Mizock & Page, 2016; Scholz et al., 2019; Washington & Evans, 1991). While traditional Chinese self-cultivation in Confucianism literature has emphasised learning Confucian texts and self-control, our *Ren*-oriented Confucian allyship emphasises interpersonal emotions and interpersonal bonds. These emotional affects are as important as text learning and self-control in Chinese self-cultivation.

Moreover, in exploring processes of one-of-us allyship, we have highlighted the importance of understanding and engaging in cultural nuances in how community members relate to one another, and how scholarly allies might immerse themselves in these relational conventions. In providing an insider account of how to build allyship in Chinese community settings and then extend bonds to other ethnic communities, we are not proposing that effective collaborations with ethnic groups is the sole domain of cultural insiders. Rather, the proposition is for scholars to establish effective community-based allyship, and recognise that it is important that scholars are familiar with the cultural ways of being and relating to people. This is necessary for scholars to understand their place in the group to improve understanding and guide responses. Furthermore, it is also useful for potential allies from outside the culture (the third author) to work in partnership with insiders (the first and second authors) in an etic-emic hybrid fashion (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Li at al., 2018). Such relationships can offer further

sources of ongoing support and insights that allow for dialogue across respective efforts to grow human potential and improve the situations of marginalised groups.

As allied and immersed scholar activists, we have broad roles to play as part of the connective tissue between communities and institutions, such as city councils and funding bodies. This is important because these entities make decisions that impact community life (Rua et al., in Press). Our efforts to broker such broader intergroup relations often manifest in small acts, including the production of successful grant applications to support specific community initiatives. These broader inter-organisational relationships can also provide the focal point for the co-design of community-led research projects and programs as well as knowledge exchange events where communities can communicate with each other.

Our account also highlights the functioning of power within allyships. Scholar activists are embroiled within broader structural power relations that are brought into the community. Scholar activists are generally employed in universities and as a result have a higher degree of autonomy, privilege, and security than many of the community partners (Derickson & Routledge, 2015). Being aware of such imbalances enables the development of inclusive strategies that ensure that scholar activists act as resources for the community to enact shared agendas. They can also use their institutional standing to take action *with* rather than *on* behalf of the community to obtain resources to address community needs.

Our account demonstrates that the politics of resourcefulness plays an important role in the sustainability of allyship between the scholar activist and community. Derickson and Routledge (2015) suggested three levels of resourcefulness that inform scholar-activism, which seem pertinent to the strategy outlined in this article. First, scholar activists can share the resources and privileges they enjoy (e.g. time, access to libraries, technology, and expertise) to support the efforts of community collaborators. This first level is reminiscent of the *Shengren*

level of Chinese relationships. Second, resourcing can take form through co-designed events and participative research projects to address issues of concern to the community. The *Shuren* and *Zijiren* stages mirror this second level of resourcing. On the third level, issues of resourcing extend to the politics of resourcefulness, which requires sustained, active community participation and partnership, that is, one-of-us allyship based on *Zijiren* relationships. With the community actively involved in helping others we see how *Ren* can be promoted and the positive impacts of ethical allyship become more self-sustaining.

In closing, the new Confucian approach to allyship that has been outlined has resonances with scholar activist traditions that are foundational to applied social and community psychologies. For example, approaches advocated by Jahoda (1992) and Dewey (1916) also require scholar activists to embrace the need for immersing themselves relationally in the communities *with* whom they engage in research and action. Our approach also echoes those recently articulated by indigenous community psychologists (Rua et al., in Press) who also emphasise allyship that involves scholars within initiatives that take them beyond the realm of research and into the domain of community action and development. Engaging in such allied and human-hearted scholar activism enables scholars to realise their own humanity through service to others.

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