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# 13 In Search of an Intermediate Paradigmatic Ground: Critical Realism-Post-Positivism in Understanding Tourists' Motivation and Experiences in Asian Spas

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## Introduction

Doing research was one of the things that I enjoyed the most, especially as an undergraduate tourism student in the Philippines (my home country). I took research classes, but I cannot remember any of my research professors discussing paradigms. Maybe if they did, a very small number of people would have retained them. Twenty years ago, in the Philippines, the concept of research was more of an educational, political or commercial requirement for marketing purposes. Like many other students and research organisations in the Philippines, I was more concerned about my research aims, data collection and analysis, and writing up of results. This mindset, which I call '*a-paradigmatic* (lack of paradigm) approach' to research, continued even after I learned about paradigms in Professor Douglas Pearce's research methods class in New Zealand and after completing a masters by thesis degree.

My *a-paradigmatic* mindset was shaped not by the actual absence of a research perspective, but the anxiety that paradigms and discussions about it caused me. Innumerable studies in psychology suggest that we often fear things that are unknown or unfamiliar to us. In this case, I knew and understood the paradigms; the unknown, however, was my own paradigm. As a new and young researcher at that time, it seemed that the intellectual

ebates and rejoinders on research paradigms were compelling me to choose a 'tribe' and work according to 'tribal rules'. Thinking about it caused stress, lack of appreciation of and a non-application of a paradigm in my research. I chose not to be part of any of the tribes.

Later, I learned that I cannot conduct research without a paradigm. Although I embarked on a PhD with an *a-paradigmatic* mindset, I had to come to terms with my view of the world, my perception of reality and how I value knowledge. Three months into my PhD, my supervisor, Professor Philip Pearce, invited me to an Honours class where he lectured on paradigms and research methods. As I listened to him, I was encouraged to identify my research identity and to be confident with it while creating and pursuing new knowledge. About two years later, after he had marked a high-quality PhD thesis with a very insightful section on paradigms, Professor Pearce reinforced the need to engage with my paradigm and to write a section on research paradigms and perspectives in my thesis.

My PhD thesis was entitled 'The Asia spa: A study of tourist motivations, flow and the benefits of spa experiences'. It aimed to highlight the relationship between tourism and positive psychology in the context of spa tourism in South East Asia by understanding tourist motivations, the experience of flow and the perceived benefits of spa-going while travelling. From an *a-paradigmatic* viewpoint, I struggled to ask myself: 'who am I as a researcher?' I knew I had to start somewhere, somehow. It was not until I was two years into my PhD journey that I began to understand who I am as a researcher and to establish the true direction of my PhD research.

As I went through literature in an attempt to identify my research paradigm, I found that my research objectives, methods and intended outcomes were not matching the paradigms I first thought shaped my research. Initially, I thought I was purely a post-positivist person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005) because of the data collection methods that I was using, but I also wanted to utilise a qualitative study with non-post-positivist characteristic. And then, I thought I was a pragmatist, because of my mixed methods approach and a dual research position, i.e. subjectivist and objectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). How I viewed reality, however, was not in the way of a pragmatist. Finally, I decided that my worldview was in the middle ground, and that my paradigm was a hybrid one – a combination of at least two paradigms. And this, my friends, is what this chapter is about.

This chapter aims to underpin the importance of having a paradigm, to provide an understanding of the benefits of an 'intermediate paradigmatic ground', and to share accounts from the life of a PhD student who struggled to find her own research identity. This chapter consists of three parts: (a) an overview of the PhD, including key concepts used; (b) a brief review of paradigms in tourism and the use of an intermediate paradigmatic ground in my research; and (c) my post-PhD reflections about my research perspective.

## The PhD: Overview and Context

The PhD project involved three studies, in which I tried to maintain consistency in terms of informants and geographical context. Study 1 was an on-site survey in India, Thailand and the Philippines. The questions were about 'flow' and travel career pattern (TCP) scales, previous travel and spa experiences and other profiling information. The respondents were spa-going tourists at the destination. Study 2 was an online survey that was similar to the on-site survey, except for modifications, which were mainly rating statements of the TCP statements based on two levels: general travel motives and spa-going motives. The online survey also did not include the flow scales. Lastly, Study 3 involved netnography, that is, an analysis of travel blogs that contained accounts of tourists' spa experiences in South East Asia, specifically in the countries where Study 1 was conducted.

This plan, however, was not the original one. I was supposed to explore motives and experiences of a narrow segment of tourists, i.e. those who were staying in spa or health resorts/retreats for wellness programs, and not a general population of spa-goers. A special access to spa/wellness tourists was a major requirement for the study, but because privacy is an important factor for hotel and resort guests, I had to acquire verbal and written permission and/or sign declarations regarding protocols. So, I embarked on my field trip, and my first stop was India. I was scheduled to fly from Townsville, Australia to Mumbai via Hong Kong on 25 November 2008, and to meet with a spa manager of an upscale resort in South Mumbai on the afternoon of 26 November to discuss data collection protocols. The flight from Townsville, however, was delayed by several hours, affecting all connecting flights and meetings set for the next day. Knowing that I would likely miss the meetings, I asked to reschedule them later that week. I arrived at midday in Mumbai on 26 November, and on the evening of that day, the horrific terrorist attacks in South Mumbai took place.

Because of the attacks, I was left with very few potential respondents as most of the establishments I previously contacted withdrew my access to resort guests as part of their safety and security measures for guests and employees. It was also assumed that tourists felt vulnerable to security or privacy breaches considering that travel and other profiling information were to be collected from them. Three weeks after the attacks and without success in accessing potential respondents, I shared my frustration with Professor Pearce. He was optimistic that we could still carry out the research; we just had to modify the study's direction. The thought of going back to the drawing board, changing research objectives and, ultimately, changing travel plans to other parts of India, to Thailand and the Philippines frustrated me further. Additionally, I was still traumatised by the thought that I *could have been* in a meeting in that resort when the attacks happened. The calm encouragement and wise counsel that

Professor Pearce imparted amidst my challenges, however, helped me maintain my composure, balance and a sense of direction.

### Concepts used in the PhD

Although the course of my project changed, it took me one and half years after the change to find my research paradigm. I decided that mine is a hybrid – a mix of critical realism and post-positivism. In considering these paradigms, however, it is important to understand key concepts used in my PhD. These concepts are: (a) wellness; (b) tourist behaviour and motivation; and (c) the relationship between positive psychology and tourism. A fourth concept introduced here is the emic–etic distinction and their relationship to paradigms in the latter part of the chapter.

#### *Concept 1 - Wellness*

In this day and age, wellness is a common term that is widely used by the general public. In analysing wellness as a term and concept, common themes were drawn from the literature in various disciplines and specialisms. It was found that wellness is simultaneously a process and a state of being. It is multidimensional/holistic, subjective, relative and task-oriented (Panchal, 2012, 2013). As a multidimensional and holistic concept, wellness involves not only health and well-being but also happiness and satisfaction. Saracci (1997) argues that the wellness state relates more closely to happiness than to health. Further, Smith and Kelly (2006) suggest that concepts of happiness and health are different even though both encompass the term ‘wellness’. While health can be self-assessed, it is usually measured objectively by traditional medicine. Well-being, happiness and satisfaction, on the other hand, are subjective and can change over a period of time (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2008). Since wellness is broadly subjective and usually based on self-judgement, its manifestation is also dependent on the individual; this means the person has a sense of control over the degree of wellness that he/she wants to obtain (Cowen, 1991; Carruthers & Hood, 2004), and therefore it is task-oriented (Myers *et al.*, 2000).

#### *Concept 2 - Tourist behaviour: Motivation & the Travel Career Pattern (TCP) theory*

Tourist behaviour is an important aspect in studying tourism. I have found that Clawson and Knetsch’s (1966) idea of travel behaviour is one of the simplest methods to explain this concept (in Pearce, 2005). They propose five phases: (1) pre-purchase or anticipation; (2) physical travel to the destination; (3) on-site experience; (4) return travel; and (5) extended recall and reflection. A further analysis of this approach suggests that this behaviour is a complex cycle rather than linear in nature, where phases may overlap each other at the same period of time, or a new cycle may emerge at any given phase.

A concept that is closely linked with tourist behaviour is 'motivation'. It is argued that motivation is a long-term (Pearce, 1982) and intrinsic process (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Hsu & Huang, 2008). Pearce (2005: 25) defines motivation as 'the total network of biological and cultural forces which give value and direction to travel choice, behaviour and experience'. Pearce and his colleagues' work on motivation evolved over the years. In this study, I used and slightly modified Pearce and Lee (2005) Travel Career Pattern (TCP) theory, which is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The TCP approach suggests three layers of motives. The first layer consists of core motives that fundamentally influence travellers' decisions regardless of their travel experience; these are novelty, escape/relax and relationships. The second layer are moderately important motives which tend to focus on self-enhancement and host community contact needs. The third and least important layer is defined by specialist needs such as nostalgia, romance and adrenaline-based adventure. Broadly, the TCP suggests that tourists' motivational patterns change over their life-stages and/or with travel experience (Pearce, 2005; Panchal & Pearce, 2011).

#### *Concept 3 - The Positive Psychology-Tourism linkage and 'Flow'*

Following Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Pearce (2007: 3) defines positive psychology as a 'scientific study of positive emotions, characters strengths and positive institutions serving or concerned with human happiness and well-being'. In my contribution to Pearce and Filep's (2013) book, I offered two areas where positive psychology (along the lines of wellness) and tourism are linked: (a) the amount of 'flow' in tourist experiences; and (b) the perceived benefits of spa experiences. Flow is an optimal psychological state that is defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) as an experience that 'stems from people's perceptions of challenges and skills in given situations' (cited in Ellis *et al.*, 1994: 337). In my PhD, I used the Flow State Scale (or FSS-2) in measuring flow among tourists who had at least one spa experience while on holiday. This tool was chosen as a post-event assessment of flow, and to ascertain the respondent's particular peak experience (Panchal, 2012, 2013).

#### *Concept 4 - Emic and etic perspectives*

My PhD uses both emic and etic perspectives. In simple terms, emic is an insider's view of a phenomenon, while etic is an outsider's view. For my thesis, I explained that an emic researcher becomes an insider by taking the perspective of people who are engaging in the behaviour, and using the knowledge bases of the setting, the people and their explanations to describe the phenomenon. An etic researcher, on the other hand, becomes an outsider by providing the participants a worldview or perspective to which they respond (Pearce, 2005).

## Paradigms in Tourism

Since Kuhn (1962) first used the term paradigm in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, so much has been written about it. Moreover, controversies were raised resulting in the so-called *paradigm wars* and the proliferation of literature on paradigms. Paradigms have demarcated schools of thought (e.g. natural and social sciences), and many thinkers have identified the dominant paradigms that shape their respective discipline(s) and specialism(s). In the debates, scholars have offered insights to abate the rampant intellectual conflicts, if not to appease some of those involved in them. One approach was to consider paradigms as a continuum that reflect a researcher's discipline and philosophy (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hunt, 1992; Meredith *et al.*, 1989). Another way of dealing with conflicting beliefs and practices was the adoption of alternative paradigms and use of mixed research methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Meredith *et al.*, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, 2012). I find Tashakkori and Teddlie's collective works to be the most notable example of the evolution of multiple-paradigm options that resulted from appraisals and debates (see Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012).

At the time when I was reading and writing about paradigms for my thesis, I followed debates within the study of tourism. For example, Hollinshead (2004; cited in Gale & Botterill, 2005) identified four paradigms in tourism: positivism, constructivism, critical theory and post-positivism. I noticed that although mainstream tourism research often works within a positivist/post-positivist paradigm (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Walle, 1997), the rejection of positivism is also commonplace in this field of study (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Nash, 2001; Pearce, 2004; Rojek & Urry, 1997). Pearce (2004) argues that it is important to understand what is being rejected, and it should be recognised that positivism is a fundamental perspective in studying the natural sciences. He further warns, '[t]here is a danger, however, in the over-enthusiastic and simplistic rejection of positivism as the bad boy of scientific thinking. There can be a value in natural science style methods for investigating human behaviour and there is a role for generalisations about tourism and tourist behaviour even if they are not law-like' (2004: 61). Also, Jennings (2010: 58) observed that although more emphasis on positivist/post-positivist paradigms was given to research in the past, the recent years have seen a gradual shift in the employment of qualitative approaches to obtain 'deeper meanings people attribute to tourism and tourism experiences, events and phenomena'.

In more recent times, these debates are still prevalent. Nevertheless, I observed that the discourses on tourism research paradigms have advanced; they are much richer and more complex. The current literature still focuses on the nature of paradigms but also recognises the changing



approaches in knowledge production in tourism studies. This evolution in debates suggests that tourism as a field of study is more mature and deserves much respect as a discipline. The more recent works of Tribe *et al.* (2015) and Munar and Jamal (2016a) offer an insightful analysis of the nature and consequences of paradigms in tourism studies. In Tribe *et al.*'s (2015) triologue, the authors observe that Kuhn has not considered the notion of a paradigm as appropriate for the social sciences; they explained that paradigms offer detailed distinction between the natural and the social sciences. Tribe *et al.* advocate an analysis of paradigms as an implicit response to Kuhn's call for a similar and comparative study of paradigms in other fields of study. In the same work, Tribe *et al.* (2015: 30) broadly suggests that the study of tourism is based on a structured evolution that is typified by a 'less universal, more fuzzy, more speculative and rarely completely settled but rather fluid and on the move' nature. Munar and Jamal's (2016b) book, for example, is a collection of essays on tourism research paradigms focused on critical and emerging topics.

### Intermediate paradigmatic ground: Post-positivism and critical realism

A paradigm is distinguished by the stance of its proponents in three fundamental ways: (1) ontology (the nature of reality/what I thought to be a reality); (2) epistemology (what is known and my research position in relation to the subjects being studied); and (3) methodology (the process of conducting research). Heron and Reason (1997, cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005) suggest a fourth basis in distinguishing paradigms. They suggest axiology that involves the type of knowledge that is valued and how it is valued, and takes into account the role of values in the research processes. The major paradigms in contemporary social and behavioural sciences and their basic assumptions are presented in Table 13.1.

My PhD research perspective follows Walle (1997) and Jennings' (2010) view that one topic can be studied using different paradigms. In my PhD thesis, I wrote: 'This position, which can be termed as "*intermediate paradigmatic ground*" is derived from similarities, if not meshing of the two perspectives in terms of ontological stances, epistemologies, methodologies and even axiologies. I coined this term to reflect a middle ground or a mediating position between two different sets of perspectives or approaches (Gale & Botterill, 2005; Hollinshead, 2004; Jennings, 2010). The notion of mixed paradigms, however, is not novel. It is noteworthy that these two paradigms are classified as one in the works of Hollinshead (2004) and Gale and Botterill (2005). The latter authors, following Stockmann (1983), argue that critical realism is not simply post-positivist; it is anti-positivist. While such a notion is accepted in this work, post-positivism and critical realism are each presented as individual paradigms in the justifications concerning why and how this research was developed.



Table 13.1 The major research paradigms

	Paradigms					
	Positivism	Post-positivism	Critical realism	Critical theory	Constructivism/interpretivism	Pragmatism
<b>Ontology</b> (the nature of reality/what is thought to be a 'reality')	Reality exists 'out there' and is driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms.	Reality exists but can never be fully apprehended. It can only be incompletely understood.	Fallible truths are produced by social and historical circumstances.	Virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values; crystallised over time.	Realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them.	Pragmatic view of the world that what works is what is 'real' or true; hence the acceptance of external reality.
<b>Epistemology</b> (what is known and how one is positioned in relation to reality)	It is both possible and essential for the inquirer to adopt a distant, non-interactive posture. Values and other biasing and confounding factors are thereby automatically excluded from influencing the outcomes.  (Dualist/Objectivist)	Objectivity remains a regulatory ideal, but it can only be approximated, with special emphasis placed on external guardians such as the critical tradition and the critical community.  The possibility of researcher bias is acknowledged.  (Modified objectivist)	Objectivity can be attained.  The possibility of researcher bias is acknowledged.  (Modified objectivist)	Values mediate inquiry.  (Subjectivist)	Inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two.  (Subjectivist)	Experience emerges as a continual interaction between people and their environment; accordingly, this process constitutes both the subjects and objects of inquiry.  (Both subjectivist and objectivist)

Table 13.1 *Continued.*

	Paradigms					
	Positivism	Post-positivism	Critical realism	Critical theory	Constructivism/ interpretivism	Pragmatism
<b>Methodology</b> (the process of acquiring knowledge, i.e. research)	Questions and/or hypotheses are stated in advance in propositional form and subjected to empirical tests (falsification) under carefully controlled conditions.	Emphasise critical multiplism.  Redress imbalances by doing inquiry in more natural settings, using more qualitative methods, depending more on grounded theory and reintroducing discovery into the inquiry process.	Emphasise multiplism.  Primarily quantitative but may use qualitative methods.	Eliminate false consciousness and energise and facilitate transformation.	Individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus.	Mixed methods.
<b>Axiology</b> (what and how knowledge is valued)	Knowledge is propositional and of intrinsic value.	(the same as positivism)	Knowledge is propositional, of intrinsic value and a potential means to social emancipation.	Knowledge is propositional, transactional and a way to achieve social emancipation.	(the same as critical theory)	(the same as critical realism)

Source: (From PhD thesis (p. 47) and based on Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Jennings, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

The following sections consider how the studies are shaped by ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological considerations' (Panchal, 2012: 48).

### Mixed paradigms in studying spa tourist motivations and experiences

It is important to be reminded that my research was about tourist motivation for, experiences of and reflections about spa tourism. The work was pursued within post-positivist and critical realist paradigms but also attempted to consider carefully the emic and user perspectives in the design and conduct of the studies. This section will provide an analysis and justification for an intermediate paradigmatic ground from ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological views. The linkage between emic-etic perspectives and these paradigms will also be presented. An overview of these two paradigms is shown in Table 13.2.

#### *Ontology*

The post-positivist recognises that there is a 'real' reality in the world but it is not fully understood. Such reality driven by laws needs to be checked, evaluated and negotiated. The critical realist views reality as being shaped by different factors and as being crystallised over time (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These two stances mesh in the context of the flourishing health and wellness phenomena. While I did not seek to identify laws that create the perceived reality for this project, I recognised the value of historical foundations of concepts in understanding the phenomenon. It was clearly acknowledged that the evolution of wellness based on historical accounts was an important source of its complexity and richness. This complexity is due to the negotiability of the term and concept. As discussed in the previous section, wellness is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be defined, interpreted and projected in different disciplines, norms and even scenarios. Despite the complex nature of the term, the wellness industry exists and continues to grow globally.

The historical development of a concept contributes much to its clarity and most importantly acceptability. The evolution and development of tourist behaviour as a broad concept, for example, is important in how it is understood today. I have observed that many earlier works that contribute to the understanding of tourist behaviour are inclined towards post-positivism (cf. Ryan, 2000). The academic negotiations, debates and rejoinders in Harrill and Potts' (2002) three phases of tourist motivation models development, for example, are an indication of post-positivist's need for evaluation and negotiation about the perceived reality. As Goodson and Phillimore (2004) observed, positivism and post-positivism paradigms provide the context within which many tourism researchers operate.

**Table 13.2** The current research paradigm (Modified from my PhD thesis (p. 49) and based on Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Jennings, 2010)

	Paradigms		Intermediate paradigmatic ground
	Post-positivism	Critical realism	
Ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-There is a 'real' reality out there but it can never be fully understood (that is external to the researcher)</li> <li>-Reality is driven by natural laws that can only be incompletely understood</li> <li>-Reality needs to be checked, evaluated and negotiated about ('Does it really exist?')</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reality is shaped by social and historical circumstances</li> <li>-Reality is crystallised over time</li> <li>-Treating social structures as a result of past practices as 'reality' can be re-examined</li> </ul>	There is a 'real' reality outside the observer that has been crystallised over time. My ability to understand it was imperfect and the need for examination to get the best understanding of it was recognised. Such reality needed to be evaluated.
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Objectivity remains a regulatory ideal, but it can only be approximated (absolute researcher objectivity is <i>unattainable</i>).</li> <li>-Observations are theory-laden and influenced by theory, but the researcher can construct theory inductively.</li> <li>-Special emphasis is placed on external guardians such as the critical tradition and the critical community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The possibility of research bias is acknowledged</li> <li>-Separating the researcher from what is being studied is a challenge</li> <li>-The credibility of our position in relation to what is known can be checked by interested communities</li> </ul>	Absolute researcher objectivity was unattainable, and observations were theory-laden. The 'emic' approach embedded me as the researcher in the phenomenon being studied, and I was willing to have the credibility/trustworthiness of my epistemological stance be checked and evaluated by the critical community (i.e. the people involved in the study or other researchers).
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Emphasise critical multiplism: Chiefly quantitative with some tendency to see qualitative methods as a precursor to quantitative methods</li> <li>-Researches in more natural settings using more qualitative methods</li> <li>-Depends more on grounded theory and reintroducing discovery into the inquiry process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Eliminate false consciousness and energise and facilitate transformation</li> <li>-Encourage reflection</li> <li>-Encourage conversation and dialogue</li> <li>-Question people's current experiences</li> </ul>	It was acknowledged that a single perfect scientific method does not exist. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be compromised. In the study, quantitative approaches were used primarily but qualitative methods eliciting participants' ways of reflecting and knowing (i.e. blogs/texts) were also used. Research designs aimed at boosting emergent or new discovery.
Axiology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Is propositional and of intrinsic value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Is propositional and of intrinsic value</li> <li>-Potential means of social emancipation</li> </ul>	In both paradigms, knowledge proposes facts/realities rather than beliefs, which makes it value-free and neutral. Although knowledge may be a potential driver of social change, it was not an ultimate goal of the project.

### *Epistemology*

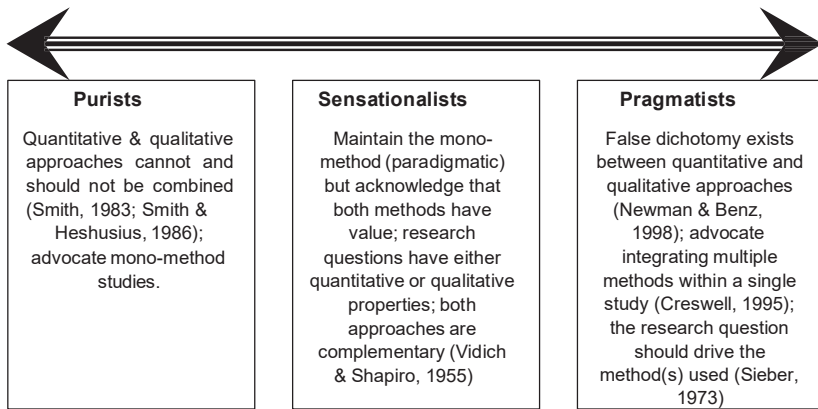
The key questions in epistemology are ‘what is known?’ and ‘how one is positioned in relation to reality?’ Guba (1990) suggests that post-positivists are modified objectivists whose objectivity remains a regulatory ideal, but it can only be approximated (cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005). He further adds that critical realists are modified subjectivists where the possibility of research bias is acknowledged. Subjectivism is an epistemological stance where the knower and the known become inseparable (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The meshing of these two epistemological positions was manifested by the inherent approximations of the observations, and the inability to reach total objectivity yet openness of the researcher’s position to be evaluated in terms of credibility (partly subjective). The application of post-positivist epistemology is evident in the use of tourism-related theories (e.g. motivation) and positive psychology models (e.g. flow, well-being) to guide my study of tourist spa-goers behaviour in Asia. However, the critical realist part of me acknowledged potential bias because I am: (a) a Southeast Asian woman who understands the differences in wellness practices in Asia; (b) a regular spa-goer at home and while travelling, which collectively mean that I have a wealth of experience; and (c) knowledgeable of different standards in spa therapies and spa management in Asia. Hence, the difficulty that I faced in separating myself from my observations also typified me as a critical realist.

### *Methodology*

My methodological perspective followed the works of Jennings’s (2010) and Rossman and Wilson’s (1985). Following Ambercrombie *et al.* (1988), Jennings (2010) suggests that an empirical statement or theory is one which can be tested by evidence drawn from experience. Both post-positivist and critical realist paradigms emphasise methodological pluralism where both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. The motivations and flow experiences in an Asian spa context were measured quantitatively (using questionnaires) and statistical calculations were employed in the studies. However, the on-site survey (Study 1) and online questionnaires (Study 2) were limited to certain aspects of tourists’ spa experience. Scholars suggest that experiences cannot be accessed directly by quantitative research (Caru & Cova, 2008; cited in Panchal, 2012, 2014). Netnography, i.e. blog analysis (Study 3) was used to obtain people’s thoughts and feelings about their spa experience(s).

Also linked to this notion of pluralism is Rossman and Wilson’s (1985) work that suggests a continuum that can be differentiated with the extent to which each regards how qualitative and quantitative styles can co-exist and can be used together (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The three schools of thought are the purists, sensationalists and pragmatists (Figure 13.1).



**Figure 13.1** The differences between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Adapted from Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005: 376–377)

My PhD work used a *sensationalist perspective* where much value was given to both quantitative and qualitative approaches although a single method was employed in each study.

### *Axiology*

Knowledge in both post-positivism and critical realism is proposed by facts and not by beliefs. In my thesis, I wrote: ‘Such propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The critical realist’s axiology, however, is extended to the possibility of shaping social emancipation. While such an objective is admirable, the topic for this research is narrow and does not extend significantly to social-change and policy-making imperatives’ (Panchal, 2012: 51).

### *Etic and etic*

As explained earlier, I am part of the spa-going populace in Asia, by which I considered myself an emic researcher. While collecting data for Study 1 specifically, I stayed in spa resorts, bought spa packages and spa treatments which were vastly available to tourists in India, Thailand and the Philippines. By taking part in activities that potential respondents were involved in, I had the opportunity to gain insight on different spa experiences. As an *insider*, I was challenged by segregating what I knew from my respondents’ perspectives.

To address this critical realist epistemological position, I adopted an etic approach according to Fetterman (1989). He argues that a researcher may employ an emic perspective while collecting data, but must detach himself from the data at some stage to make sense of the empirical material. The outsider’s view that I employed had two layers of detachment: (a) incorporating blog analyses which allowed me to explore the unknown

among tourist bloggers; and (b) interpreting collected data as PhD student, and not as a fellow spa tourist.

There were episodes throughout my PhD where my emic/etic views were challenged. The most notable incidents occurred during the data collection in Thailand. The paper surveys were distributed in beaches, spas, resorts and departure areas in airports in Bangkok and Phuket, and as I and/or my local research assistant approached potential respondents, we were asked if we offered massage treatments as well. While some were generally curious, there were those who commented with sexual undertones. I tried my best to respond with tact and logic. With an emic mindset, however, it was challenging to ignore comments that I perceived were rude, condescending or insensitive. During the last two weeks of data collection in Thailand, I distributed the surveys by myself (i.e. without research assistants). At that time, I decided to see myself as a researcher rather than a tourist spa-goer. I noticed that with an etic perspective, I felt less offended in similar situations. I took note of the comments but did not report them in my thesis.

As I approached the end of the PhD, I was confident with an intermediate research perspective. I had mostly the ontological and epistemological functions of a post-positivist, and the methodological and axiological bases of a critical realist. I started with no clear paradigm and ended with a multi-paradigm mindset. I did not think much about paradigms in isolation for the rest of the candidature, but I was at peace knowing that I had good supervisors, who had a sound perspective of the world and wealth of opportunities to produce knowledge.

### Post-PhD Musings on Paradigms

It's been over five years since I completed my PhD. When I look back, I smile; this may sound trite, but 'the entire PhD journey was not easy, but it was worth it'. On my graduation day, the guest of honour commented that my thesis sounded interesting and asked if I would have done it again. I said yes without batting an eyelash. Her follow-up question was, 'is there anything that you would have done differently?' I remember responding politely, but I could not recall what I told her. In writing this chapter, however, I had the opportunity to ponder the same question that I was asked on graduation day. And, in closing, I wish to impart my response to her question as if she were asking me again today, and I am hopeful that new researchers will find these insightful and encouraging.

An appreciation and application of at least one research paradigm is valuable in one's research work. I learned that knowing the paradigms *per se* is not enough; *knowing my paradigmatic identity in research* should have been one of my priorities. My a-paradigmatic approach to research when I began my PhD was a result of anxiety of maybe choosing a wrong paradigm. It took me years to realise that as a researcher,



identifying one's self to a paradigm is better than not having a research perspective at all. Until recently, I blamed the 2008 Mumbai attacks for the change in my research direction. In retrospection, however, it is clear that my internal struggle was caused by a lack of recognition of my own research perspective.

I also realised that a mismatch in ontological stance, epistemological, methodological and axiological bases was not a sign of failure but an opportunity for intellectual growth. I could have recognised the 'intermediate paradigmatic ground' as an alternative to mono-paradigms much earlier in the PhD candidature. By having an intermediate perspective, I was able to logically link conclusions from my three studies because being in the 'middle ground' provided greater appreciation of the strengths and limitations of each paradigm as well as flexibility in designing research.

An intermediate paradigmatic ground also encouraged me to have both insider and outsider perspectives. Despite the challenges in data collection, analysis and interpretation, I appreciated the value of having emic and etic mindsets. Nevertheless, I could have *established a stronger etic approach earlier* in my research. In hindsight, I could have responded to questions and interpreted comments (e.g. sexual undertones) in Study 1 with a researcher mindset rather than a spa-goer mindset. From a methodological viewpoint, I could have used the help of research assistants throughout the data collection period in Thailand. Clearly, an emic perspective was more dominant, but an etic approach was useful in addressing epistemological issues and in diversifying research methods.

Indeed, Kuhn (1969) was right in describing paradigms as essential elements to scientific inquiry. He wrote, 'men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice' (cited in Sarantakos, 1998: 32). I find that the analogy of choosing a tribe is still a fitting way of identifying one's paradigm, and one of the best things that resulted from the decades of debates is the option of an intermediate paradigmatic ground, which allows researchers to be part of more than one tribe.

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