

Yung-Jong Shiah

Yung-Jong Shiah is a Chinese psychologist who has carried out ESP research, including experiments in collaboration with American parapsychologist Dean Radin.

Career

Yung-Jong Shiah received his PhD degree in psychology from the University of Edinburgh. He works at the Graduate Institution of Counseling Psychology and Rehabilitation Counseling, National Kaohsiung Normal University. Shiah carries out research in transforming Chinese cultural heritage (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) to science in terms of both conventional and unconventional perspectives, and collaborates with Western researchers exploring distant effects of intention. His publications can be seen [here](#).

Intention Infused Tea

Shiah and Radin carried out a rigorously designed, double-blinded experiment to test the idea that tea that had been 'infused' with good intentions might improve mood. They arranged that on seven consecutive evenings, participants should record their mood and that on certain days they drink the tea twice. Half of the participants received intention infused tea and the other half received ordinary tea, blinded to which was which. Participants were paired by age, gender, psychological trait of neuroticism, and the amount of tea they consumed on average per day. They were then randomly placed in either the treated or no-treated group.

The researchers found that those who drank treated tea showed a greater uplift in mood than those who drank untreated tea ($p = 0.02$). The improvement was greater among those who believed they were drinking treated tea than among those who did not believe ($p = 0.00002$). However, this difference was driven mainly by those believers who were actually receiving the treated tea, underlining the role of belief in any paranormal healing effect, even in a blinded experiment.^{[1](#)}

Intention Imprinted Water

Shiah and Radin followed up the tea experiment by investigating whether *Arabidopsis thaliana* seeds hydrated with intentionally treated water would show differences in three standard biological measures: hypocotyl length, anthocyanin level, and chlorophyll level. Three Buddhist monks were instructed to focus intention on commercially bottled water with the goal of improving the growth of seeds. Untreated bottled water from the same source served as a control. The seeds were hydrated with treated or untreated water by a technician who was unaware of the nature of the water that was being handled, following which they were placed in random positions in an incubator. This germination process was repeated three times in each experiment, and the entire experiment being repeated four times, making it sufficiently powerful to detect relatively small healing effects. The results

across the four experiments showed an astronomically significant decrease in hypocotyl length ($p = 10 \times 10^{-14}$); a highly significant increase in anthocyanin levels ($p = 10 \times 10^{-4}$); and a modest increase in chlorophyll ($p = 0.05$).[2](#)

Shiah and Radin attempted to replicate their 2017 study, adding a condition where the seeds as well as the water were intentionally treated. Arabidopsis seeds were used as these contain a photosensitive flavoprotein called cryptochrome, which has been proposed as a possible mediator of paranormal influences because it is governed by quantum processes and might be sensitive to the consciousness of an observer. As in the first study, Shiah and Radin arranged for three Buddhist monks to direct their attention toward commercially bottled water and Arabidopsis seeds, while holding the intention to improve the growth of the plant. Under the same highly controlled conditions as before, highly significant effects for treated water were found, indicating growth promotion healing influences: shorter hypocotyl length ($p = 0.04$); higher chlorophyll levels ($p = 0.0005$); and higher anthocyanin levels ($p = 2 \times 10^{-6}$). Directly treated seeds resulted in greater amounts of chlorophyll ($p = 0.04$), longer hypocotyl length ($p = 0.0004$) and lower anthocyanin levels ($p = 0.01$). Shiah and Radin concluded that intentionally treated water improved the growth of the Arabidopsis, but a more complex relationship and lower effect with treated seeds than with treated water.[3](#)

In a third study done in collaboration with Dean Radin from the Institute of Noetic Sciences and funded by the Bial Foundation, Shiah continued to investigate the effect of intention treated water on human mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs).[4](#) Water was imbued with healing intention from the focused meditation of three Buddhist monks. Under double-blind conditions, the expression of several genes associated with cell growth were measured. Shiah and coworkers found highly significant differences in cell growth favouring those treated with intention imbued water over the controls ($p = 0.0008$). It was concluded that intentionally treated water appeared to have some biological effects on the growth of human mesenchymal cells. Treated cells did not consistently show superior growth and Shiah cautions against over interpreting this exploratory study, especially given that adjusting for multiple testing would reduce the significance levels; nevertheless, significant findings from a double-blind protocol justify further research.

Understanding Visual Paranormal Perception

Shiah developed a model to explain processes underlying paranormal perception. In a typical ganzfeld or remote viewing session the participant who acts as ‘receiver’ of images being telepathically transmitted describes a visual image, which may or may not match the actual target. Little is known about the process involved in generating these images. Shiah proposes a model in which the anticipation of seeing a target image leads to a priming effect in the brain. Initially, the visual cortex binds the various colours and forms of the target into a complete whole. Then the frontal lobe processes this information in the memory to arrive at a recognized object.[5](#)

Although the evidence for psi is strong,[6](#) theories that are neurologically oriented are only recently becoming prominent. [7](#) In concert with this shift among

theoreticians, Shiah has outlined a mechanism for the initial stages of psychic perception. In this model he proposes that ESP information triggers a chemical reaction in cryptochromes, which then propagates, ultimately resulting in a signal sent to the brain where it is decoded and perceived. Cryptochromes are recently discovered light-sensitive proteins distributed in body tissues including the retina and pineal gland, which has a long history of association with psi phenomena [8](#)

Finger Reading in Taiwanese Children

The 'finger-reading' effect refers to paranormal identification of flat target numbers, colours, words, or symbols on paper by touch only. Work in Taiwan over a decade appears to show promising results in training children in a method developed by Si Chen-Lee. However, Shiah notes that these claims are weakened by a lack of rigorous controls that rule out fraud, and describes highly controlled trials to address concerns of potential fraud, sensory leakage and recording errors. He concludes that replications under controlled conditions would encourage greater resource allocation for finger-reading research and, potentially, academic recognition of these abilities.[9](#)

However, Shiah's own attempts to replicate the effect failed. In the first experiment, eighteen children were tested to see if they could identify a two-digit number and the print colour by touch alone. There was no significant finger-reading effect, nor any significant relationships between finger-reading scores and questionnaire responses concerning imagery ability and paranormal beliefs. In the second experiment, an attempt was made to screen talented participants, but this too failed to produce any evidence. Shiah concluded that such abilities, if they exist, are hard to observe under controlled conditions.[10](#)

Religiosity and Spirituality in Chinese Culture

In three studies, Shiah systematically compared the spiritual and paranormal orientations of five Chinese religious groups. In the first study, a Chinese version of the Index of Core Spiritual Experiences was developed. In the second and third studies, spirituality and religious involvement were found to be greatest among Christians, followed by Buddhists, and then Taoists. A concern for practical benefits of religion was highest among Taoists, followed by Buddhists, then Christians. Shiah concludes that the results are consistent with the conclusion that Christianity offers the most support for a spiritual or religious orientation and the least for a practical expression. Conversely, Buddhism displayed the reverse pattern.[11](#)

Revised Chinese Paranormal Belief Scale

Shiah investigated the relationship between paranormal belief and religiosity among Chinese college students of different religious faiths, including atheists. A Chinese version of the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale was developed, including testing the veracity of the new psychological measures, and found to be reliable. Chinese religious believers scored higher on paranormal belief than Christians and atheists. Shiah concluded that the paranormal practices incorporated in Chinese

religious belief systems might contribute to greater levels of paranormal belief compared to the minority Christian population. The results support the idea that Christianity may offer the least support for paranormal belief.[12](#)

Proposed ESP Training Model

Shiah proposed a Three-Stage ESP Training Model as a means to achieve more reliable results in experiments. The model is designed to help novices to achieve progressive development over a number of trials, and takes place in three stages. In the first, the focus is on achieving the quiet and/or drowsy state of consciousness that is thought to be conducive to ESP experience. Since this can take years to achieve, shortcuts can be to use participants who have extensive experience of meditation, or to use ganzfeld, relaxation, biofeedback or other methods. In the second stage, the participant is exposed to a remote ESP target being 'sent' from a distant location. No feedback is given, and the participant is encouraged to wait patiently until some accurate mentation occurs. Only participants who are successful in both stages (achieving a quiet state of consciousness in EEG measures and achieving some accurate mentation) go on to the third stage, in which feedback is given to help the participant distinguish ESP awareness from other awareness.

Once this ability has been developed, participants can be presented with more difficult and complex tasks. To test this model, researchers can choose one type of ESP performance to run while being cautious about feedback, along with a control group which receives no training.[13](#)

Nonself Theory

A core practice of Buddhism is ego-dissolution, or surrendering of the self in order to attain a pure state of consciousness. Shiah has defined this state as the *nonself* and it is here where psi abilities are manifested. Shiah draws a clear distinction between everyday egoic consciousness in which the person's self or identity are strengthened and the *nonself* in which desires are supplanted by compassion and seeking wisdom. The ego engages in psychological activities to strengthen the self, seeking desire-driven pleasure. In contrast, a nonself approach involves self-cultivation in three ways: giving up desires, displaying compassion and practising meditation. This also provides a comprehensive framework to account for experiences such as altruism, mindfulness, meditation, mysterious/peak experiences, elimination of death anxiety, and moral conduct.[14](#)

In a report published in 2022, Shiah and coauthors describe two studies examining the relationships among renunciation of desires, death anxiety, and mental health.[15](#) In the first study, Shiah constructed a Desire Questionnaire (DQ), which measures success in renouncing certain desires. In the second study, 501 adults from a Chinese society ranging in age from 17 to 84 years completed the Desire Questionnaire, the Death Anxiety Scale (DAS), and the Chinese Health Questionnaire (CHQ), which measures mental health and the presence of psychiatric symptoms. Correlations found between these measures suggest that the negative effect of poor desire control on mental health is caused, in part, by death anxiety. Shiah concludes that these results support the relevance of Nonself Theory to death anxiety, as an egoless nonself is not focused on desires.

Cryptochrome Theory

Evidence of psi phenomena indicates that consciousness is energy-based as well as information-based, transcending boundaries of space and time. Shiah's Cryptochrome Theory hypothesizes that cryptochrome, a flavoprotein that is present in all living systems and that has the characteristics of quantum biological molecules, is a 'transducer' of psi.¹⁶ Shiah proposes that psi information triggers chemical reactions in the cryptochromes, influencing the spin states of paired radical ions. This process activates the cryptochromes and then spreads their summed signal throughout the brain, creating a meaningful synthesis. Because cryptochromes are highly concentrated in the inner retina and the pineal gland, the chemical reactions that mediate ESP should be most active in these locations. This new concept also might explain certain mystical, transcendental, or paranormal phenomena such as seeing gods or ghosts and distant healing, assuming they are energy-based. Another hypothesis is that cryptochromes not only receive the psi signals but also send them, like an antenna.

Jun-zi Self-Cultivation Model

The *I-Ching (Book of Changes)*, the most important ancient source of information on traditional Chinese culture and cosmology, provides the metaphysical foundation for this culture, especially Confucian ethics and Taoist morality. In a 2022 article,¹⁷ Shia and co-authors describe four previous *Tai-Chi* models based on the *I-Ching* and their limitations.

To overcome the limitations of the four previous *Tai-Chi* models, the authors transform *I-Ching* cultural system into a psychological theory by applying the cultural system approach. Specifically, they propose the *Jun-zi* (君子) self-cultivation model (JSM), which argues that an individual (小人, *xiao-ren*) can become an ideal person, or *jun-zi*, through the process of self-cultivation, leading to good fortune and the avoidance of disasters (趨吉避凶, *qu-ji bi-xiong*). The state of *jun-zi* is that of the well-functioning self, characterized by achieving one's full potential and an authentic, durable sense of wellbeing. They also examine possible theoretical directions, clinical applications, and avenues for future research.

Contentless Consciousness Theory

In a 2023 paper,¹⁸ Shiah describes his contentless consciousness theory (CCT), specifying two types of consciousness: delusional and contentless. Contentless consciousness is the true consciousness. The consciousness most of us have is delusional consciousness. We can eliminate the delusions of consciousness and their psychological structures by pursuing self-enlightenment. Eventually the delusional consciousness is transformed into contentless consciousness, a state of total liberation and authentic happiness. The three kinds of empirical evidence for supporting CCT are also described which are near death experiences, mediumship, and reincarnation. The paper concludes by providing possible applications and topics for future research.

Works

Book

In *Foundations of Chinese Psychotherapies: Towards Self-Enlightenment* (2021), Shiah provides an overview of the foundations of Chinese psychotherapy, based on a consideration of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist teachings. This book is intended to serve as a practical guide to coping with life's adversities, guiding readers towards authentic happiness by means of novel approaches to mental health problems.

Articles

A list of articles by Shiah can be found [here](#).

Michael Duggan

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Shiah & Radin (2013).
- [2.](#) Shiah et al. (2017).
- [3.](#) Shiah & Radin (2020).
- [4.](#) Shiah, Y.-J. (2022).
- [5.](#) Shiah (2011).
- [6.](#) Cardena (2018)
- [7.](#) Marwaha & May (2015)
- [8.](#) Luke (2010)
- [9.](#) Shiah (2005).
- [10.](#) Shiah (2008).
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- [12.](#) Shiah et al. (2010).
- [13.](#) Shiah (2009).

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- [15.](#) Kuo (2022).
- [16.](#) Shiah (2012b).
- [17.](#) Xu, Chang, Hsu, & Shiah, 2022).
- [18.](#) Shiah (2023).

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