

Cognitive Processes of Posttraumatic Growth in Chinese Culture: A Conceptual Framework

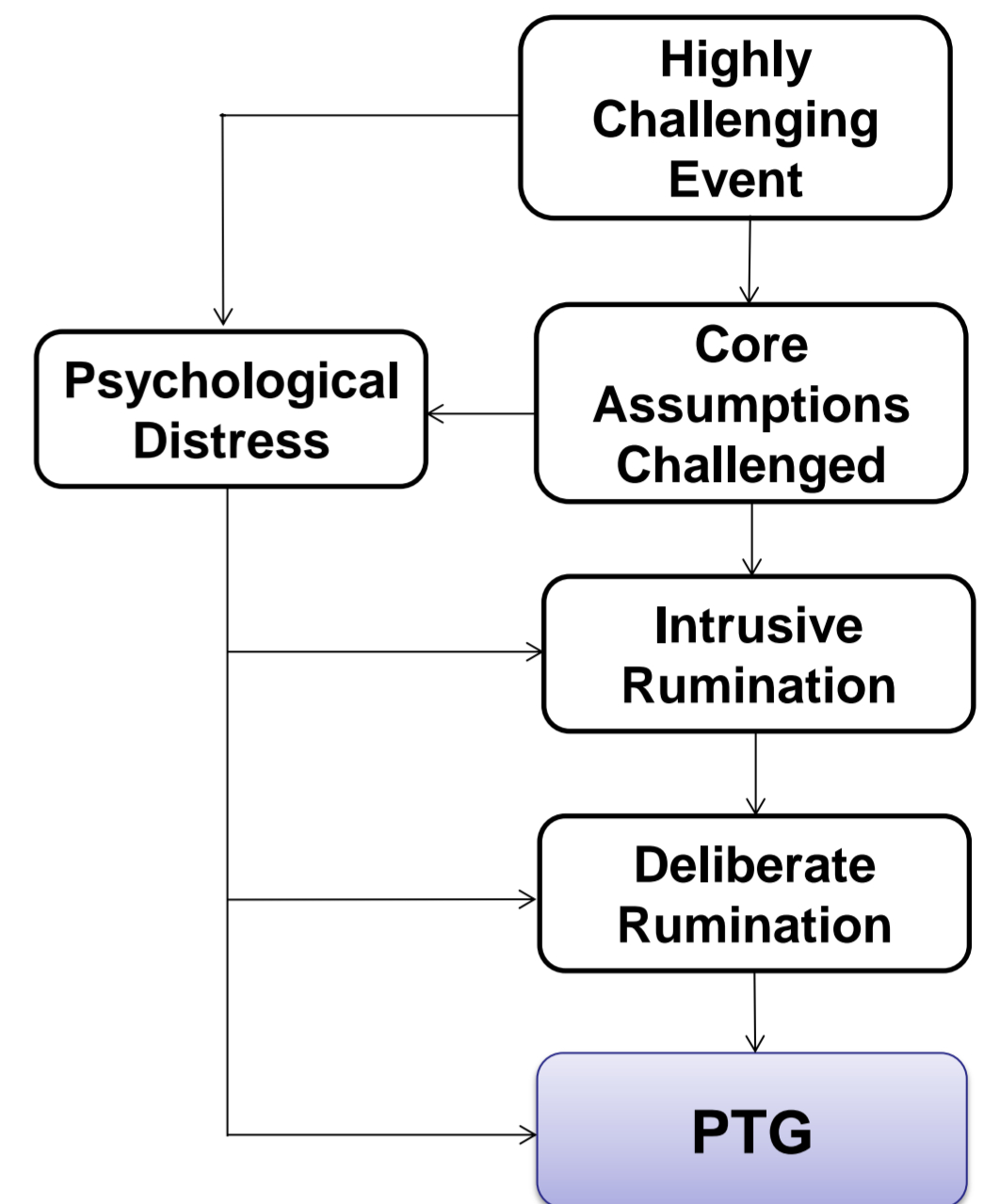
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Background

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to psychological positive changes which occur as a result of struggling with a range of highly difficult life circumstances. PTG can be manifested in **five major domains**, including 1) increased appreciation of life, 2) increased sense of personal strength, 3) improved important interpersonal relationships, 4) changed priorities and recognition of new possibilities, and 5) richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Current models of PTG (e.g. Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2010; Joseph and Linley, 2005) conceptualise that a highly challenging life event can initiate critical **bipolar** cognitive processes known as **intrusive rumination** (uncontrollable, unwanted event-related thoughts) and **deliberate rumination** (controlled, constructive event-related thoughts).

PTG is not conceptualised as an increase in well-being or a decrease in psychological distress. Paradoxically, PTG and distress are thought to coexist as two **separate, independent** constructs since continuing levels of effectively managed distress may fuel PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).



A simplified illustration of the functional descriptive model of PTG (Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2010).

Understanding PTG: The Yin Yang Approach

Taoism emphasises “way of life”. The Chinese word “tao” (道) literally means “the way”. The Taoist perspective recognises the way nature changes, and all things are interconnected and interdependent in the universe.

The Taoist concept of Yin Yang represents the idea that opposite things are complementary and inseparable, and they give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. There exists neither absolute black nor absolute white.

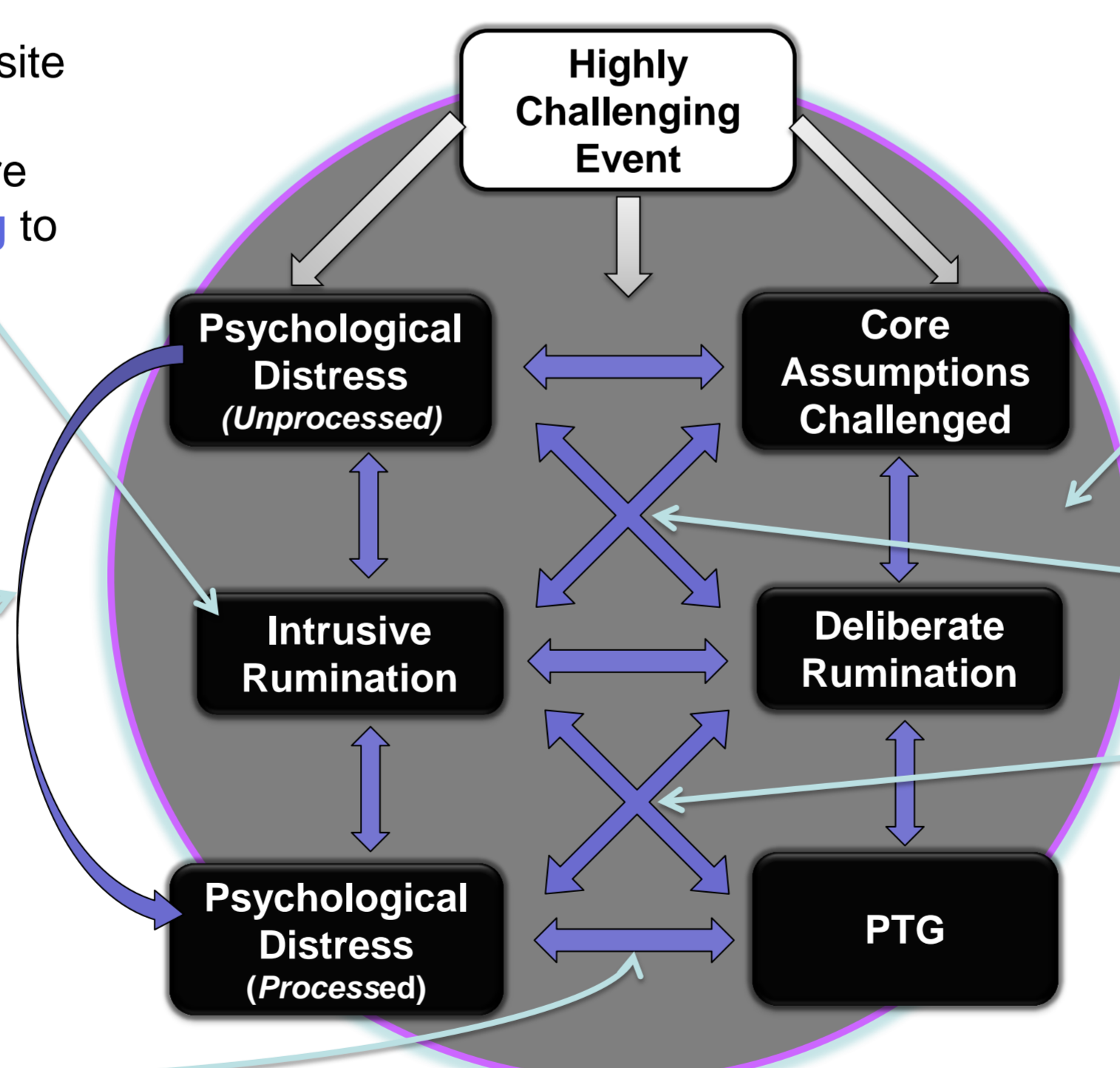


The Taoist perspective gives a holistic, dynamic, and paradoxical worldview which is seen as different from the dualistic, reductionist, and dialectical thinking which influences every aspect of life in Western cultures (e.g. Zheng & Gray, 2015; Abramson, 2003).

Intrusive and deliberate ruminations are not opposite end points on a bipolar continuum but instead, are related like **Yin and Yang** to allow **self-regulation**.

Both processed and unprocessed distressing emotions influence and **balance** each other to foster eventual PTG.

PTG and distress are not separate dimensions but they complement each other for a **balanced** system of emotions.



Impact of cultural, religious and philosophical belief system of human emotions and life on both distal and proximate influences on the PTG process (Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2010).

The relationships among core beliefs challenge, intrusive rumination, deliberate rumination, distress, and PTG are not necessarily sequential but are all **interdependent** and **interconnected** through **fluidity** and **stability**.

Diagram illustrating the proposed Yin Yang approach to understanding the Western conceptualisation of the process of PTG.

Some Main Issues in PTG Literature

- A paucity of literature on the specific aspects of socio-cultural elements in affecting the PTG process.
- Although cross-cultural studies are scarce, previous studies have shown cultural differences in both levels of PTG and the role of deliberate rumination in PTG among Japanese and U.S. college students (Taku, Cann, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2009; Shigemoto & Poyrazli, 2011).
- A need for a better understanding of cultural influences on psychological health beliefs, and the development of culturally sensitive research and practice for individuals facing, struggling, coping, or overcoming major life's challenges.
- The proposed conceptual framework can be used to encourage future growth researchers to investigate specific aspects of socio-cultural influences on PTG.

Literature Cited

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