



Department of Psychology  
The University of Hong Kong

香港大學心理學系

**Brown Bag Lunchtime Seminar (Via Zoom)**  
**(Theme: Social and Health Psychology)**

## **Chaordic Society with “Virtuous” Entity: Moral Superiority Facilitates (Intergroup) Conflict Perpetuation**

12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. | March 31, 2023 (Friday)



**Devin Zaixuan ZHANG**

PhD student

Department of Psychology

The University of Hong Kong

### Abstract

People engage in various morally relevant attitudes and behaviors during intergroup conflicts. Yet, fewer investigations have been conducted to address the specific effects of intergroup conflict on individuals' moral domain. We believe that intergroup conflict could impact individuals' moral domain by eliciting moral superiority. As for moral superiority, even though some scholars suggested its negative effects on intergroup relations, they did not reveal how moral superiority exacerbates intergroup conflict directly.

Regarding that, across 10 studies (N = 2,253), we focused on two research questions: the effect of intergroup conflict on individuals' (group-based) moral superiority and the effect of moral superiority on outgroup dehumanization, as well as their mechanism. Based on the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, Study 1 showed that perceived intergroup conflict positively predicted moral superiority. It also revealed that perceived threats, especially symbolic threats, account for the effect above, while such moral superiority could then lead to further outgroup dehumanization. Study 2 replicated all the effects in Study 1 with the same methods but American participants in the context of the 2020 Presidential Election. Study 3 provided causal evidence that intergroup conflict could induce greater moral superiority, while the mediating role of perceived threats (especially symbolic threats) and the downstream outgroup dehumanization was also detected. To differentiate the effects of different threats (realistic vs. symbolic) on moral superiority, Studies 4 and 5 manipulated the conflicts with different threats using different paradigms. For results, we detected a distinct impact of intergroup conflicts with symbolic threats on moral superiority and further outgroup dehumanization. Study 6 found that moral superiority predicted outgroup dehumanization via perceived ingroup status. By manipulating moral superiority in real-world contexts, Studies 7 and 8 replicated the above mediation model and found the downstream outgroup aggression. Study 9 even replicated these Studies 7 and 8 with a minimal group paradigm. Study 10 found that emphasizing an equal intergroup status could limit the effect of moral superiority on outgroup dehumanization, as well as further outgroup aggression.

Together, our findings suggested the important role of moral superiority in intergroup conflicts and intergroup conflict perpetuation, whereas it bridges the intergroup conflict individuals encountered and their external reactions (i.e., outgroup dehumanization and downstream outgroup aggression). We also theorized two major foundations of moral superiority (i.e., “status-promotion” and “meaning-making”) and provided consistent evidence regarding its “status promotion” function. We hope the current research may help interpret intergroup conflict perpetuation and benefit intergroup conflict solutions.

### About the speaker

ZHANG Zaixuan (aka. Devin CHEUNG), a PhD candidate under the supervision of Prof. CHEN Zhansheng. He does research in a variety of domains, including ostracism, objectification, and intergroup relation, especially morality & moral superiority. His current dissertation project is about the role of moral superiority in intergroup conflict perpetuation.

### Zoom

<https://hku.zoom.us/j/3951550048?pwd=SncvL3RYakEycUtpL29vdDJEEdlEwdz09>

Meeting ID: 395 155 0048 | Password: psyc



**~All are Welcome~**

**Enquiry: [rpsyc@hku.hk](mailto:rpsyc@hku.hk)**