# Understanding Must Precede Criticism:
# A Response to Yoshitake's Critique of
# Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory*

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Abstract

Yoshitake (2002) presents a "critical examination" of anxiety/ uncertainty management (AUM) theory. Yoshitake's criticisms reflect a lack of understanding of some of the central constructs in AUM theory, are based on different metatheoretical assumptions than those on which AUM theory is based, and contain fallacious logic and value judgments.

Yoshitake (2002) presents a "critical examination" of anxiety/ uncertainty (AUM) management theory (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995). Usually, I do not respond to criticisms of AUM theory. I decided it was necessary to respond to Yoshitake's critique, however, because (1) many of his criticisms reflect a lack of understanding of the central concepts in AUM theory, (2) some of his criticisms are based on different metatheoretical assumptions than those on which AUM theory is based, and (3) some of his criticisms are based on fallacious logic and imposing value judgments. Not responding to these problems with Yoshitake's critique would lead to further misinterpretations of AUM theory. Prior to addressing Yoshitake's criticisms, I briefly overview the development of AUM theory to put it in context.

## The Development of AUM Theory

I became interested in effective intercultural communication and intercultural adjustment while serving as an Intercultural Relations Specialist with the U.S. Navy in Japan. While working in Japan, I noticed that U.S. Americans interactions with Japanese were influenced by the U.S. Americans feeling that they did not understand the Japanese people with whom they

communicated and their inability to feel comfortable living in Japan. I also observed many misunderstandings between U.S. American and Japanese participants in the Japan - U.S. Intercultural Communication Workshop held in Nihonmatsu, Japan (many of whom were specialists in intercultural communication). My experiences in Japan led to pursuing doctoral work in intercultural communication after getting out of the Navy.

I developed the anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theoretical research program in several stages. Initially, I developed a model of interpersonal and intergroup communication (Gudykunst, 1985) by integrating uncertainty reduction theory (URT; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1981). I choose URT as a starting point because it included variables (e.g., similarity) that allowed easy extension from interpersonal to intergroup encounters, and I thought predictability (the inverse of uncertainty) of host nationals' behavior was related to intercultural adjustment. I choose to focus on intergroup communication because I view intercultural communication as one type of intergroup communication (e.g., when the main group membership influencing communication is based on culture) and social identity theory provided a foundation for understanding intergroup communication.

Next, Mitch Hammer and I (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988) developed a version of the theory that used uncertainty reduction and anxiety reduction to explain intercultural adaptation (this version contained 24 axioms). At about the same time, I incorporated Stephan and Stephan's (1985) work on anxiety into an abstract theory of effective interpersonal and intergroup communication and intercultural adaptation that also focused on anxiety and uncertainty reduction (Gudykunst, 1988; this version of the theory included 13 axioms, with two focusing on cross-cultural variability). Neither of the 1988 versions of the theory were labeled AUM; both focused on reducing anxiety and uncertainty. Reducing anxiety and uncertainty, however, were not the "outcomes" explained in the theories; rather, effective communication and intercultural adaptation were the outcomes.

In 1993, I modified the 1988 version of the theory focusing on anxiety and uncertainty management (e.g., maintaining anxiety and uncertainty between minimum and maximum thresholds in order to make effective communication possible), incorporating mindfulness, expanding the number of axioms, making the axioms more concrete than the 1988 version (so that they could be applied), and adding axioms on cross-cultural variability (this version contained 49 axioms, with 11 focusing on cross-cultural variability). I also explicitly stated the metatheoretical assumptions in this version of the theory. The 1993 version of the theory focused on interpersonal and intergroup communication competence. It was the first version of the theory to be labeled AUM. Unlike the 1988 version of the theory, the 1993 version of the theory was designed to be a

practical theory (e.g., a theory that individuals could apply to improve the quality of their communication). The change in focus from anxiety and uncertainty reduction to anxiety and uncertainty management, and focusing on practical application instead of just explaining effective communication changed the fundamental nature of the theory.

In 1995, I clarified several concerns raised about the 1993 version of the theory and expanded the discussion of cultural variability in AUM processes (i.e., this version contained 94 axioms, with one cross-cultural axiom for each of the 47 axioms in the main part of the theory). This version of the theory incorporated ethical aspects of communicating with strangers and maintained the goal of being a practical theory like the 1993 version.

I revised the intercultural adjustment version of the theory (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988) in 1998 (Gudykunst, 1998a), and outlined how it can be used to design intercultural adjustment training programs. This version of the theory was designed to be practical so that sojourners could apply the theory to help them adjust to living in other cultures. Both the effective communication (the working draft contains 47 axioms; 39 in the main part of the theory and eight focusing on cross-cultural variability) and the intercultural adjustment (the working draft contains 47 axioms) versions of the theory are in the process of being revised (Gudykunst, forthcoming a, forthcoming b).

The two AUM theories are presented in the form of "causal process" theories. The theories, however, deviate from typical causal process theories in several ways. First, the vast majority of causal process theories are based on determinism. The two AUM theories, in contrast, are based on the assumption that individuals' behavior is sometimes determined by external factors (e.g., situations) or internal factors (e.g., intergroup attitudes), and sometimes individuals choose how to behave (e.g., when they are mindful). This position is clear in the metatheoretical assumptions and in the axioms (see Gudykunst, 1993). Second, AUM theories are designed to be practical theories. That is, they are designed to be applied by individuals to improve the quality of their communication with strangers and help them adjust to living in other cultures, not simply to explain these phenomena. Third, ethical issues are incorporated into both AUM theories and causal process theories do not incorporate ethical issues. Fourth, both AUM theories incorporate cultural variability in communication and causal process theories generally focus on one level of analysis. Fifth, not all axioms in the theories are testable (e.g., the axioms focusing on mindfulness probably cannot be tested directly) and all axioms in causal process theories should be testable.

**Yoshitake's Critique of AUM Theory**

Yoshitake's critique focuses on recent versions of the effective communication AUM theory (e.g., Gudykunst, 1993, 1995). References to

AUM theory below, therefore, refer to this theory unless otherwise noted. Space does not permit me to address all of the problems with Yoshitake's critique of the AUM theories. To facilitate linking my discussion with Yoshitake's criticisms, I use his major and minor headings as the minor headings in this section (even though this leads to some redundancy in the material discussed).

### The Elements of AUM Theory

Yoshitake begins by summarizing the "major elements" of the theory (i.e., effective communication, uncertainty, anxiety, mindfulness). The summary of the major constructs is relatively short and inaccurate in places. To illustrate, after quoting the definition of effective communication used in the theory (e.g., minimizing misunderstandings), Yoshitake goes on to say "in other words, effective communication is a process of isomorphic attributions" (p. 179). This is not the position I take in the theory, but there is one sentence in the 1993 version that mentions Triandis' (1977) idea of isomorphic attributions. I consistently argue that there always are differences in the meanings that individuals attribute to messages.

In discussing mindfulness, Yoshitake claims "communicating with strangers requires us to be mindful so that we pay attention to our own scripts of communication as well as those of strangers" (p. 179). Again, this claim is inconsistent with all statements of AUM theory. Communicating with strangers does not require mindfulness.  I consistently argue that individuals usually communicate with strangers at low levels of awareness (e.g., based on scripts), and when this occurs individuals assume that strangers are interpreting their messages the ways they intended. Individuals, however, can choose to be mindful when they want to communicate effectively with strangers and minimize misunderstandings. Also, when individuals are mindful, their focus should not be on scripts, as Yoshitake contends. Rather, individuals should focus on the processes involved in their communication with strangers when they are mindful.

Yoshitake concludes that "excellent management of the increase or decrease of the levels of anxiety and/or uncertainty leads to effective communication" (p. 179). Again, this is not the position I take in AUM theory. Rather, I argue that when individuals' anxiety and uncertainty are between their minimum and maximum thresholds, they can mindfully try to understand strangers and how strangers are interpreting their messages. In other words, managing anxiety and uncertainty so that they are between minimum and maximum thresholds only lays the groundwork for effective communication. It is what communicators do next that influences whether their communication is effective or not. To the extent that individuals are able to understand strangers and negotiate meanings with them, their communication will be effective.

My comments so far may seem like minor quibbles over the meanings of

Yoshitake's sentences. This is not the case. Yoshitake's misunderstandings of the major concepts in AUM theory influence his interpretations of other aspects of the theory and lead to criticisms that are groundless.

## Historical Background of AUM Theory

Yoshitake begins his critique with the "historical background of AUM theory" and intercultural communication studies (p. 180). The most interesting aspect of this section for me involves Yoshitake's discussion of the introductory essay I wrote for *Intercultural Communication Theory* which was the first volume of the *International and Intercultural Communication Annual* (Volume VII) that I edited (Gudykunst, 1983).

Yoshitake argues that my critique of focusing on "sensitizing concepts" (e.g., sets of expectations, assumptions) in the introductory essay "was the beginning of the logical-positivist empire era in the ICC [intercultural communication] studies" (p. 180). I simply do not understand how this could be the case. My critique of focusing on sensitizing concepts was a call for theorizing in general, not a call for a particular type of theorizing. Further, the volume that I edited contained chapters focusing on various approaches to theorizing in intercultural communication including constructivism, rules theories, attribution theory, rhetoric, systems, linguistic, phenomenological, and grounded approaches. My goal in editing the volume was to promote theoretical pluralism in the study of intercultural communication, and I continue to take this position today (e.g., see Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989; the book I am currently editing, *Theorizing about Communication and Culture*, contains chapters devoted to virtually all of the major theories in intercultural communication).

## AUM Theory is Limited to Effective Communication

Yoshitake argues that there are two problems with the focus on effective communication in AUM theory: "(1) the definition of effective communication, and (2) effective communication as a goal of ICC" (p. 182). Yoshitake's criticisms in both of these areas are unwarranted.

With respect to the definition, Yoshitake argues that individuals communicate for a variety of reasons and he questions whether the "attribution of the closest meaning is necessary or even possible" (p. 182). There is nothing in AUM theory that would suggest that people only try to communicate effectively or that it is always necessary or desirable. Rather, AUM theory is designed to help individuals communicate effectively when they choose to do this.

Yoshitake argues that "to view effective communication as attribution of the closest meaning to the intended meaning reduces communication to a linear and mechanical activity where messages are transformed from sender to receiver" (p. 183). I have no idea how Yoshitake could infer this from the definition of

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effective communication used in AUM theory (i.e., minimizing misunderstandings). Yoshitake's inference is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how communication and effective communication are conceptualized in AUM theory.

The conceptualization of communication or effective communication in AUM theory is not linear or mechanical. Yoshitake appears to understand how communication is conceptualized in the theory. He states that "Gudykunst regards communication as a 'process' of exchanging messages and creating meaning, rather than an 'outcome.' Meaning[s] cannot be transferred, only message[s] can" (p. 178). Given this conceptualization, how can communication be viewed as linear and mechanical? Further, the argument in AUM theory, and in all applications of the theory, is that communicators have to understand strangers and the meanings they attach to messages in order to communicate effectively. Being mindful helps communicators understand strangers' cultures, their ethnicities and other group memberships, as well as how these influence strangers' communication so that they can negotiate meanings with strangers.

Mindfulness involves making conscious choices about how to communicate and it is not linear or mechanical in any way (see Langer, 1989, 1997). Langer (1997), for example, points out that mindfulness involves "(1) openness to novelty; (2) alertness to distinctions; (3) sensitivity to different contexts; (4) implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives; and (5) orientation in the present" (p. 23). None of these processes are linear or mechanical. Mindfulness (or "paying attention" as some authors call the process) is associated with having flow experiences when interacting with friends and engaging in creative endeavors (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); successful democracy, facilitating the growth of children, and having sustainable lives (Bellah *et al.,* 1991); transcendence of the self (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993); improving the quality of learning and teaching (Langer, 1997), individuals' physical and mental health (Hanh, 1975); and excellent and ethical job performance (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001).

Yoshitake's tendency to view effective communication as linear and mechanical in AUM theory may be due to his stereotype of "causal" theories (e.g., all causal theories view communication as linear and mechanical). This may be due to the way that I stated the axioms in the theory. I used the "causal process" format of axioms because I thought they would make it easy for individuals to understand how to apply them to improve the quality of their communication. I clearly point out in several places, however, that AUM theory is not a typical causal theory (these deviations were summarized earlier).

Yoshitake's misunderstanding of how communication and effective communication are conceptualized in the theory also may be due to the fact that the negotiation of meaning is not emphasized in the theory itself. The negotiation of meaning is not discussed in detail in the theory because the theory

focuses on what ingroup members can do to communicate effectively with strangers. It is impossible to specify how to negotiate meanings with strangers - it depends on the individuals, the situation, the topic, their past communication, and so forth.

I thought it was sufficient to point out that when individuals are mindful that they need to try to understand strangers and the meanings they are attaching to the messages exchanged. Negotiating meanings, nevertheless, is what communicators need to do when their anxiety and uncertainty are between their minimum and maximum thresholds and they are mindfully trying to understand strangers in order to communicate effectively. The processes involved in the negotiating meaning are discussed in applications of the theory (e.g., Gudykunst, 1998b; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). It appears that some elaboration and clarification regarding the processes involved in  negotiating meaning when individuals are mindful is needed in the forthcoming version of the theory.

In discussing the "problem of effective communication as a goal of ICC," Yoshitake claims that viewing effective communication as minimizing misunderstandings

> is extremely mechanical with less emotional attachment, treating pure
> communication without misattribution as ideal. Due to placement of
> high priority on efficiency, culture is regarded simply as "noise" that
> interrupts the smooth transition of communication, idealizing purely
> IPC [interpersonal communication, I assume]. (p. 183)

"Pure communication without misattribution" is not an ideal in AUM theory (it is assumed to be impossible). AUM theory does not emphasize efficiency in any form or view culture as "noise."

Axiom 40 in the 1995 version of AUM theory suggests that individuals must understand strangers' "stocks of knowledge" (a large part of their cultures). Further, all discussions of mindfulness emphasize that communicators must understand strangers' perspectives (which are influenced by their cultures) if they are going to communicate effectively. Stated differently, communicators must understand strangers' cultures in order to negotiate meanings with them. Culture is not a central construct in the main part of AUM theory because it is a theory of effective interpersonal and intergroup communication, not a theory of effective intercultural communication, and culture is only one of the factors influencing strangers' communication that ingroup members need to understand in order to communicate effectively. Culture, however, is the focus of the second part of the theory (e.g., axioms 48-94 in the 1995 version).

The conceptualization of effective communication used in AUM theory, minimizing misunderstandings, is only one possible way to define it. I choose this definition initially because I believe that understanding strangers is important if intergroup relations within or between cultures are going to be improved. This is more important today than it ever was. There are, nevertheless,

other conceptualizations of effective communication that could be used.

Tominaga, Gudykunst, and Ota (2003) examined perceptions of effective communication in the United States and Japan. Seven themes were isolated in the United States: (1) understanding, (2) compatibility, (3) displaying positive behavior, (4) smoothness of communication, (5) positive outcomes, (6) positive nonverbal communication, and (7) adapting messages. Nine themes were isolated in Japan: (1) compatibility, (2) appropriateness, (3) relations between communicators, (4) positive outcomes, (5) smoothness of communication, (6) displaying positive behavior, (7) understanding, (8) positive nonverbal communication, and (9) clarity.

The labels for several themes are similar across cultures in Tominaga *et al.*'s (2003) study, but the content of the themes tend to be different. Perceptions of effective communication appear to be outcome-based and individual-focused in the United States, and process-based and relationship-focused in Japan. I argue in the forthcoming version of the theory (Gudykunst, forthcoming a) that any of these conceptualizations of effective communication could be used without changing the axioms of the theory. Only the "outcome" on which communicators focus when they are mindful needs to be changed. In some interactions communicators may want to focus on minimizing misunderstandings and in others they may want to focus on maintaining good relations with strangers. The choices they make will influence how they want to communicate when they are mindful.

## Reliance on Consciousness

Yoshitake's criticism that AUM theory relies on consciousness suggests that he does not understand the scope of AUM theory or the concept of mindfulness. He argues that

> although humans need to be conscious to manage anxiety and uncertainty mindfully in certain occasions, excessive reliance on consciousness makes it difficult to explain contexts in which emotion and irrationality override consciousness and void rational explanations. For instance, the AUM theory might be applicable to those from a culture high in affective neutrality, but not to those from a culture high in affectivity. (p. 184)

Nothing in AUM theory suggests that communicators are or should be mindful all of the time. Even when communicators are mindful, communicating effectively with strangers does not require hyper vigilance. Rather, Langer (1997) argues that "soft vigilance" is needed. Soft vigilance allows individuals to "remain open to novelty" and be "open to take in new information" (Langer, 1997, p. 44).

AUM theory is not designed to explain interactions based strictly on emotions or irrationality (although the theory would suggest that these

interactions would not lead to minimizing misunderstandings). Rather, the argument is that when individuals <u>want</u> to communicate effectively, they can <u>choose</u> to be mindful of the process of their communication. When they are mindful, they can manage their affective reactions (e.g., anxiety, anger) so that they can understand strangers and negotiate meanings with them. These processes are not limited to individuals from cultures high in affectivity or affective neutrality. The fact that AUM theory is not designed to explain interactions based on emotions is not a problem with the theory; these processes are simply outside the scope of AUM theory.

AUM theory also does not "dissociate" empathy from individuals' emotional states, as Yoshitake claims (p. 184). The conceptualization of empathy used in the theory clearly includes cognitive and emotional components. The argument is that individuals can choose to be empathic when they want to communicate effectively, even when they are not generally highly empathic. When individuals choose to be empathic, they would engage in behaviors that Yoshitake claims are not possible when they "use empathy."  They would, for example, hold others in "positive regard" and engage in "sensitive and caring behaviors" (p. 184) because these behaviors are part of being empathic irregardless of how individuals become empathic (e.g., because of their general tendencies or by choice).

AUM theory does not over emphasize mindfulness or consciousness. In fact, the opposite may be a more accurate claim. The assumption underlying AUM theory is that communication with strangers usually takes place at relatively low levels of awareness (see Gudykunst, 1993). Being mindful or consciously aware of communication only comes into play in the theory when individuals choose to communicate effectively with strangers. Also, only two of the 47 axioms in the main part of the theory (axioms 46 and 47 in the 1995 version of the theory) focus on mindfulness.

## Western-Biased Axioms

Yoshitake claims that there is a western bias in the form and content of the axioms in AUM theory. It's possible that there is a bias in the form of the axioms, but there is not a bias in the content of the axioms. With respect to the form of the axioms, all theorists must make choices about how they will state their theoretical propositions. As I indicate in the recent versions of the theory (1993, 1995, forthcoming a), I choose to use causal process axioms because I think they provide a clear format that allows practical applications.

Based on a "content analysis" of the axioms, Yoshitake claims that there is an "Anglocentric" bias and "ethnocentric judgments of different cultures" in the content of the axioms (p. 185). This simply is not the case. Yoshitake applies value judgments (i.e., positive or negative connotations) to the axioms which are not explicit or implicit in the axioms, as he claims. He provides one example of

his logic:

> The analysis was executed as follows. In the first step, the first 47 axioms were examined in such a way that an axiom indicating "increase" in anxiety or uncertainty is coded as "negative" and vice versa, based on the fact that the theory focuses on their "reduction" in communication. In the second step, another set of 47 axioms corresponding to the domestic axioms is coded in the same way. For instance, Axiom 16 states "an increase in our ability to empathize with strangers [positive] will produce an increase in our ability to accurately predict their behavior [positive]" and the corresponding Axiom 63 states "an increase in collectivism will be associated with a decrease in the ability to empathize with strangers [negative]" (emphasis added). The logic is: If more collectivism attributes are identified, then ability to empathize decreases, which leads to a decrease in the ability to accurately predict, which is coded as "negative." In other words, collectivism implies a negative value according to these two axioms. (p. 185; all comments in brackets and underlined are Yoshitake's)

Yoshitake concludes that individualism and low uncertainty avoidance cultures are viewed positively, and collectivism and high uncertainty avoidance cultures are viewed negatively in AUM theory. This simply is not the case.

Yoshitake's example and the logic used in his "content analysis" reflect a lack of understanding of AUM theory, fallacious reasoning (e.g., the reverse ecological fallacy), and making value judgments. The recent versions of AUM theory (1993, 1995; the versions Yoshitake used in his analysis) do not focus on reducing anxiety and uncertainty. Rather, the recent versions of the theory focus on managing anxiety and uncertainty. That is, keeping anxiety and uncertainty between minimum and maximum thresholds. Anxiety and uncertainty above the maximum thresholds or below the minimum thresholds is viewed as inhibiting effective communication. The "positive" and "negative" values Yoshitake attributes to the various aspects of the axioms (e.g., that an increase in the ability to empathize in axiom 16 is "positive") are not inherent in the theory or implied in the theory. The "increase" or "decrease" in the axioms are statements of empirical relationships, not value judgments. There is no basis for coding any statement in the theory as having "positive" or "negative" value. The value judgments being made are Yoshitake's, they are not in the theory.

Yoshitake also is combining individual-level axioms and cultural-level axioms to draw conclusions. This is not appropriate. The two levels of axioms cannot be combined, they are different. Processes at one level cannot be generalized to the other level. In the 1995 version of the theory this was implied, but not explicitly stated (it never occurred to me that someone would combine the two levels; the forthcoming version makes this explicit). That is, the idea of generating theorems was presented after the 47 axioms in the main part of the

theory and the cross-cultural axioms were in a separate section that followed. Extending the individual-level axioms to the cultural level involves the reverse ecological fallacy. The ecological fallacy involves taking a finding at the ecological level such as the cultural level and assuming that it holds at the individual level. The reverse ecological fallacy involves generalizing processes at the individual level to the ecological or cultural level. This leads to unwarranted conclusions.

Based on his conclusion regarding individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, Yoshitake claims that AUM theory "suggests that Americans potentially communicate more effectively than, e.g., Japanese" (p. 185). There is no way to logically conclude that the theory suggests that members of one culture communicate more effectively than members of another culture. In fact, in the 1993 version of the theory, I point out that "the perspective presented here does not presuppose a particular form that our messages must take to be effective" (p. 65; e.g., direct and indirect messages can be equally effective). In applications of the theory, I also have stated explicitly that there are no differences in the effectiveness of communication in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (e.g., see Gudykunst, 1998b, p. 57; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 70). Similarly, Gudykunst, Nishida, Morisaki, and Ogawa's (1999) research suggests that the clarity of the rules in high uncertainty avoidance cultures influences perceptions of communication.

Yoshitake also concludes that "the content analysis uncovers the fact that cultural values of communication typical in the US are reflected in AUM theory" (p. 185). Again, this is simply not the case. The purpose of the cross-cultural variability section of the theory is to address how culture influences the processes involved in AUM theory. To illustrate, the differences in types of uncertainty (e.g., individual-based, group-based; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986) emphasized in individualistic and collectivistic cultures are addressed in axiom 57 of the 1995 version of the theory. Also, different aspects of the theory have been tested to determine if they apply cross-culturally (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001, found that the associations between anxiety and uncertainty and effective communication are supported in ingroup and outgroup relationships in Japan and the United States).

## Metatheoretical Critique

In his discussion of "metatheoretical" issues, Yoshitake again criticizes AUM theory for focusing on effective communication because it is a "modernistic value" and other concerns (e.g., "opportunities for learning") are not addressed in the theory. I do not see why effective communication is a modernistic value. Surely, Buddha and Jesus wanted to communicate effectively with their disciples. It may be that Yoshitake views effective communication as a modernistic value because he treats it as synonymous with efficiency. The two

ideas are not the same, and there is nothing in AUM theory to suggest they are. Trying to communicate effectively is anything but efficient in AUM theory; its extremely time consuming and inefficient.  Effective communication in AUM theory also does not "render communication to profit oriented acts, which are egoistic and individualistic" (p. 186), as Yoshitake claims.

Criticizing AUM theory for focusing on effective communication and not addressing other possible outcomes or aspects of interpersonal and intergroup encounters is unwarranted. All theories have scope conditions, and effective interpersonal and intergroup communication is the scope of AUM theory. Yoshitake is criticizing AUM theory for not addressing issues that it is not designed to address. The scope conditions of theories must be granted when criticizing them.

Yoshitake claims that AUM theory ignores strangers' "otherness."  He cites Buber's (1958) notion of intersubjective reality as an example of how otherness can be addressed. Developing intersubjective realities often requires mindfulness. Buber clearly implies, for example, that engaging in dialogue requires conscious effort for a lot of people. AUM theory does not ignore strangers' otherness, it is one of the things that individuals need to understand when they are mindful in order to negotiate meanings with strangers. The main function of being mindful in AUM theory is to facilitate understanding individual strangers and their perspectives on communication (e.g., their "otherness") so meanings can be negotiated.

Yoshitake also claims that AUM theory is based on Cartesian principles. This is true to a certain extent, but it is not a totally accurate claim. The metatheoretical assumptions of AUM theory seek a middle ground between objectivist and subjectivist assumptions. To illustrate, I assume that some of individuals' communication is deterministic and some is based on conscious choices about how to behave. Yoshitake further suggests that the focus on consciousness (and mindfulness) in AUM theory emerged from Cartesian principles. This, however, was not the case. I realized the importance of mindfulness for effective communication from reading about Zen Buddhism (e.g., Hanh, 1975; Rahula, 1974; Suzuki, 1970) and practicing Zen (e.g., sitting *zazen*, engaging in mindful activity). After realizing the importance of mindfulness, I looked for research on the influence of mindfulness on behavior (this eventually led to Langer's, 1989, 1997, work on mindfulness which is compatible with mindfulness in Buddhism; e.g., see Hanh, 1975).

Yoshitake's final criticism involves what he calls the "fallacy of value neutral theories."  Again, this criticism is not based on a clear understanding of AUM theory. One of the ways that AUM theory is different from typical causal theories is that it incorporates ethical issues. The 1995 version of the theory includes two axioms dealing with ethical issues (i.e., axiom 32 involves moral inclusiveness, axiom 33 involves respect). The forthcoming version adds a third

ethical issue (dignity) and makes "ethical interactions" a separate category used to organize the axioms. The theory, however, is not based on western values, as Yoshitake claims. The axioms dealing with cross-cultural variability are designed to explain how the processes involved AUM theory vary across cultures.

**Conclusion**

There are three major problems with Yoshitake's critique of AUM theory. First, his criticism reflects his lack of understanding of some of the central concepts in AUM theory (e.g., mindfulness; anxiety/uncertainty management). It is important that critics understand theories before criticizing them. Otherwise their criticism will be meaningless. Second, Yoshitake's criticism is based on using different metatheoretical assumptions than those on which AUM theory is based. The metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions of theories can be questioned. In criticizing a theory, however, the theory's assumptions must be granted and the theory evaluated based on its assumptions (not other assumptions). Critics cannot validly use their assumptions to evaluate theories based on different assumptions. Third, some of Yoshitake's criticisms of AUM theory are based on fallacious reasoning (e.g., the reverse ecological fallacy) and making value judgments.

It is possible that some of Yoshitake's and other critics misunderstandings of AUM theory are due, at least in part, to their stereotypes of "causal" theories; for example, "causal" theories all view communication as linear and mechanical. This stereotype may hold for some, but not all, causal theories, and it does not hold for AUM theory. AUM theory is stated as a "causal process" theory because I thought that the form would be the easiest to suggest clear practical applications. The metatheoretical assumptions of AUM theory strike a balance between objective and subjective assumptions.

The vast majority of Yoshitake's criticisms are unwarranted, but responding to his criticisms has made me realize that elaboration and clarification is needed in some areas of AUM theory in the forthcoming revision (e.g., clarifying the nature of the meaning negotiation process that takes place when communicators are mindful). Yoshitake's critique, therefore, will have a positive outcome for AUM theory.

I firmly believe there is a need for theoretical pluralism in the study of intercultural communication. I do not understand why some critics need to tear down theories with which they disagree. It is not necessary to tear down other perspectives (theories) to make a case for new perspectives (theories). If Yoshitake and other critics are concerned with improving the state of theorizing in intercultural communication, they would make a greater contribution to the field if they formulated their own theories, rather than just tearing down other theories. This is not to say that theoretical criticism should not occur. Each

version of AUM theory has benefited from sound critiques of earlier versions of the theory (e.g., critiques based on understanding the theory and its purpose).

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