

## **Introduction to Part 2 and Part 3: What Kind of Man is Paul T. P. Wong?**

### **Why Does His Psychology Matter?**

**Lilian C. J. Wong**

I am pleasantly surprised by the number of contributions in response to my call for papers for *Undefeatable: The Saga of Paul T. P. Wong's Search for Meaning and Happiness in a Difficult World*. They come from different periods of Paul's life, and from different connections, such as family, friends, students, assistants, and colleagues.

Many of the contributors are internationally renowned psychologists, expressing their high regards for Paul and his research. Some of this book's contributors have passed away – such as Salvatore Maddi and K.-K. Huang. Paul considers them as his kindred spirit because Sal was a pioneer in existential positive psychology and K.-K. was a leader in indigenous psychology. It is his hope and vision that these two major trends in psychology will gain greater acceptance.

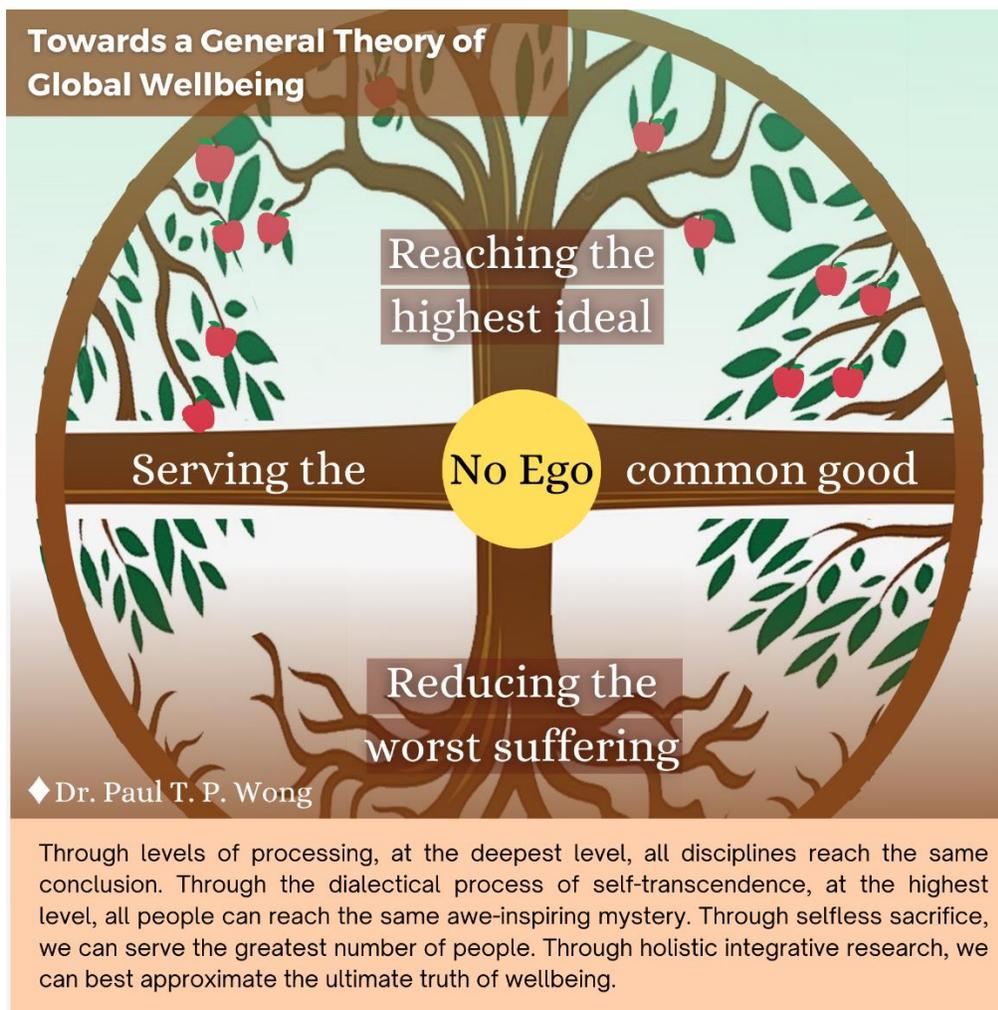
In terms of structure, Part 2 includes longer contributions. Most of them are original works which are in some way connected with Paul's research. Others reflect more deeply on their relationship with Paul or their understanding of Paul's ideas. Part 3 includes shorter contributions, such as brief tributes, reminiscences, or some noteworthy aspects of Paul's life.

### **What Kind of Man is Paul T. P. Wong?**

Surprisingly, all these diverse contributions from different cultures and different historical periods share a common theme – Paul is a genuine and kind person. He indeed practices what he preaches, and he epitomizes the deep life of flourishing through suffering as described in Figure 1.

### **Figure 1**

*The Self-transcendence Model of Flourishing (From Wong et al., 2021)*



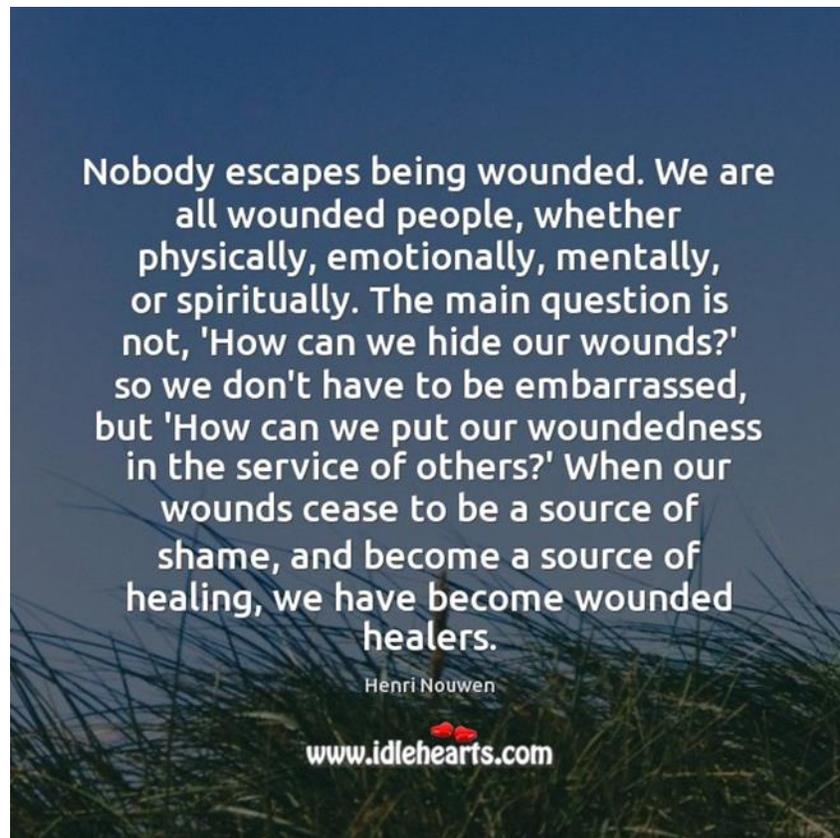
Paul believes that suffering is an inescapable part of life. As Frankl demonstrated (Frankl, 1946/1985; Wong 2021; Wong & Laird, in press), one can transcend and transform suffering through meaning and spirituality.

Paul expands Frankl's important teaching of self-transcendence into a general theory of wellbeing: when we sink our roots into the dark soil of suffering, it not only adds depth to our character, but also enables us to flourish spiritually (Wong, accepted).

He often shares his own experience of how his life has been transformed by suffering. No one knows how much he suffers on a daily basis except for me. Yet, he never complains nor

gives up. Paradoxically his suffering is his source of inspiration, strength, and joy. That is why one of his favourite writers is Henri Nouwen, widely known for his bestseller *The Wounded Healer* (Nouwen, 1979).

Paul gladly embraces the identity of a wounded healer as described by Nouwen in the following quote:



As a good soldier of Christ, he often says in his sermons or writings that: “Christ is wounded for us so that we may be healed; we are wounded for Christ so that others may be healed through us.” (Wong, 2008, p. 11)

Contrary to most people’s career path, he was willing to go anywhere God led; that is why he had chosen to teach in smaller and smaller colleges with less and less pay. He often cites Apostle Paul (his name’s sake): “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:19-

21). But he has no regrets, and he is satisfied that he is able to do his small part in glorifying God and healing the broken hearted as a psychology professor and a clinical psychologist.

As a human being, he readily confesses his shortcomings and limitations. For example, he readily admits to his assistants that he is technologically retarded. He truly believes that his weaknesses and problems are his strength, as supported by 2 Corinthians 12:10 “That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

One of his favorite hymns, *Without Him*, also expresses his deep conviction (Presley, 1967). According to his testimony, he found Jesus in his darkness hour, and it transformed his entire life. Throughout his many trials and tribulation, God was able to turn his suffering into triumph. That is why he could sing this hymn with all his heart and soul:

Without Him I could do nothing

Without Him I'd surely fail

Without Him I would be drifting

Like a ship without a sail

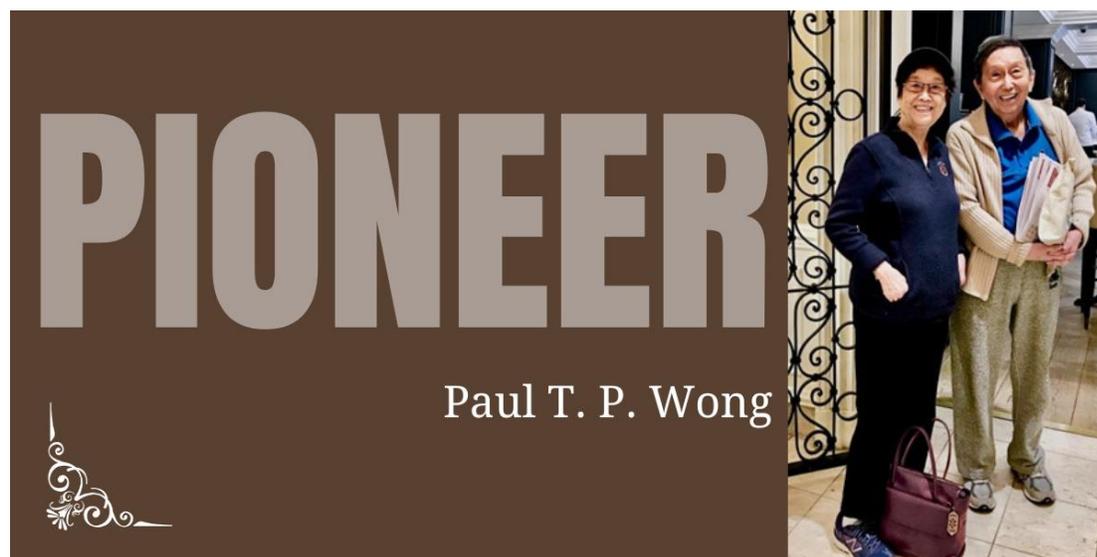
This may sound naïve or irrational to most psychologists. But to him, this is an undeniable truth, experienced by him and millions of Christians, including the founding Fathers of the United States of America. He freely shares his Christian testimony with his clients, as well as the hosts of the podcasts *Researching Happy* (Iasiello, 2023) and *1000 Reasons for Feeling Awe* (Tubali, 2023).

Often, I cannot help but feel indignant for all unfair treatments he has received. He has been maligned and attacked by so many people, including those who have benefited from his kindness. But he always comforts me with the reassurance that “they meant it for evil, but God

meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Indeed, many of his detractors have been silenced either by their passing or by his achievements.

### **Why Does His Psychology Matter in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

Recently, he was honoured as a pioneer in existential positive psychology (Wong, in press).



What kind of positive psychology is this? Why is it important for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Paul has tried to explain it in many different publications (e.g., Wong, 2020a, 2022a).

To my understanding, it is simply about how to transform the dark side of human existence and suffering into the abundant life as God originally designed us (Wong, 2019, 2020b).

He often wonders: if positive psychology is intended for all people regardless of their cultures and circumstances, why can't we develop a positive psychology for suffering people, and for other cultures? That is why he is puzzled by the hegemony of Eurocentric positive psychology (Wong & Cowden, 2022).

He is even more puzzled by mainstream psychology's resistance to his idea of faith-based flourishing through suffering (Wong, 2023a), since all the research and publications on happiness and wellbeing based on positivism have not been effective in reducing suffering (Witters & Agrawal, 2022).

In his long life, he has witnessed so many controversies in psychology, such as humanistic psychology versus behavior psychology, and negative versus positive psychology. His existential positive psychology is simply his attempt to focus on what is universal among all people; in other words, we all can develop our innate capabilities to transcend our limitations and fulfill our potentials, and that includes our innate capacity to pray and seek help from God.

In our latest writing (Wong & Wong, under review), we provide two illustrative cases to demonstrate how people can find healing and flourishing through the less travelled road of spirituality or religious faith (Peck, 1978).

His only life is also a testimony to faith-based flourishing as described in Psalm 92:12-14. In his old age (86), his mind remains clear and creative; and his heart is full of hope and joy, thanks to his personal relationship with Jesus.



**Psalm 92:12-14  
(NIV)**

**12)** The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;

**13)** planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

**14)** They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green...

The best part of his existential positive psychology (Wong, 2020c, 2023b; Wong & Laird, 2023) is that there are no hopeless cases (Wong, 2023a), no matter how sick or poor one is. He can point to a large cloud of witnesses of broken people redeemed and made whole by God's grace.

Two days ago, we went to a theatre for the first time in many years to watch Oppenheimer (Nolan, 2023). We are both shocked by the terrifying destructive power of atomic bombs, especially by the prospect that the world has now stockpiled enough atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs to destroy the entire beautiful planet earth. We are even more deeply troubled by the prospect that power-hungry mad people like Putin are willing to resort to nuclear war to conquer another country.

From the perspective of the big picture, he is more convinced than ever that the world needs his positive psychology transcendence, which emphasizes "fear God and love our

neighbours,” as the moral foundation for building the best possible life. He often cites Martin Luther King Jr: “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

**THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF  
SELF-TRANSCENDENCE**  
◆ DR. PAUL T. P. WONG

*The first five principles are proven strategies of overcoming and transcending suffering...*

1. Accept life as it is with gratitude.
2. Believe in creating a better future with help from Providence.
3. Commit to worthy goals and a life purpose.
4. Discover the hidden treasures by digging deeper.
5. Enjoy inner peace and harmony.
6. Love others as yourself.
7. Fear God and obey his commandments.

*...The last two principles are the moral foundations of caring and doing no harm.*

His existential positive psychology can be summed up in the above 7 principles that will enable us to live a more meaningful and peaceful life (Wong, 2022b).

According to my limited understanding, he believes that it is essential for human being to remember that we are mere mortals with limited understanding of this vast mysterious universe and its Creator.

His logic seems quite simple. If we try to play God (as Adam and Eve did in Genesis and as we still do today), the consequence is that we create our own hell and will eventually destroy one another as fools.

That is why he has a real sense of urgency that we need to hear the transcendental truth of “fear God and love our neighbours” as the foundation for human flourishing.

I hope that is brief introduction piques your interest to search deeper into his existential positive psychology in this book as well as his many publications ([www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com)).

## References

- Frankl, V. E. (1985). *Man's search for meaning*. Washington Square Press. (First published in 1946)
- Iasiello, M. (Host). (2023, August 1). Interview with Paul T. P. Wong [Audio podcast episode]. In *Researching Happy*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU1Pj-M-QOY>
- Nolan, C. (Director) (2023). *Oppenheimer* [Film]. Syncopy Inc., Atlas Entertainment
- Nouwen, H. J. M. (1979). *The wounded healer: Ministry in contemporary society*. Image, Trade PB edition.
- Peck, M. S. (1978). *The Road Less Travelled*. Rider.
- Presley, E. (1967). [Without him](#) [Song]. *How Great Thou Art*. RCA Studio B (Nashville)
- Tubali, S. (Host). (2023, July 12). Interview with Paul T. P. Wong [Audio podcast episode]. In *1000 Reasons for Feeling Awe*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc4BFg4m9WA>
- Witters, D., & Agrawal, S. (2022, August 22). In U. S., poor life ratings reach record high. *Gallup News*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/397286/poor-life-ratings-reach-record-high.aspx>
- Wong, P. T. P. (2008). Face to face with conflict: A Christian perspective. *Connection*. <https://www.tyndale.ca/sites/default/files/Tyndale-Connection--Summer-08.pdf>
- Wong, P. T. P. (2019). *Inspirations for difficult times* (L. C. J. Wong, Ed.). Toronto, Canada: INPM Press.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2020a). The maturing of positive psychology and the emerging PP2.0 [Book review of *Positive Psychology* (3rd ed.) by William Compton and Edward Hoffman]. *International Journal on WellBeing*, 10(1). Doi:10.5502/ijw.v10i1.885

- Wong, P. T. P. (2020b). *Made for Resilience and Happiness: Effective Coping with COVID-19 According to Viktor E. Frankl and Paul T. P. Wong*. INPM Press.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2020c). Existential Positive Psychology and Integrative Meaning Therapy. *International Review of Psychiatry*. Doi:10.1080/09540261.2020.1814703
- Wong, P. T. P. (2021). The Frankl cure for the 21st century: Why self-transcendence is the key to mental health and flourishing. *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, 41(2), 33-50. Doi: 10.31234/osf.io/tbx3f
- Wong, P. T. P. (2022a). Foreword. In P. Worth (Ed.), *Positive Psychology Across The Life Span An Existential Perspective*. Routledge.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2022b). The Best Possible Life in a Troubled World: The Seven Principles of Self-transcendence [亂世中活出最好的人生：自我超越的七項原則]. *Positive Psychology in Counseling and Education*. [DOI:10.30099/PPCE.202206\\_\(1\).0001](https://doi.org/10.30099/PPCE.202206_(1).0001)
- Wong, P. T. P. (2023a). Spiritual-existential wellbeing (SEW): The faith-hope-love model of mental health and total wellbeing. *International Journal of Existential Positive Psychology*, 11(2). <http://www.drpaulwong.com/spiritual-existential-wellbeing>
- Wong, P. T. P. (2023b). [Introduction: Second wave positive psychology's \(PP2.0\) contribution to counselling psychology – A paradigm shift](#). In P. T. P. Wong (Ed.), *A second-wave positive psychology in counselling psychology: A paradigm shift*. Routledge.
- Wong, P. T. P. (Accepted). Viktor Frankl, father of the positive psychology of height and depth: Why he appeals to all people [keynote abstract]. 24<sup>th</sup> World Congress, Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy. <https://www.viktorfranklinstitute.org/wc24/>
- Wong, P. T. P. (In press). Pioneer in research in existential positive psychology of suffering and global flourishing: Paul T. P. Wong. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

- Wong, P. T. P., Arslan, G., Bowers, V. L., Peacock, E. J., Kjell, O. N. E., Ivtzan, I., Lomas, T. (2021). Self-transcendence as a buffer against COVID-19 suffering: The development and validation of the Self-Transcendence measure-B. *Frontiers*, *12*, 4229.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648549>
- Wong, P. T. P., & Cowden, R. G. (2022). Accelerating the science and practice of psychology beyond WEIRD biases: Enriching the landscape through Asian psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1054519>
- Wong, P. T. P., & Laird, D. (2023). Varieties of suffering in clinical setting: Re-envisioning mental health beyond the medical model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1155845>
- Wong, P. T. P., & Laird, D. (in press). The suffering hypothesis: Viktor Frankl's spiritual remedies and recent developments. In C. McLafferty, Jr. and J. Levinson (Eds.), *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis: Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy Frankl Institute Vienna* (Vol. 2). Springer Research.
- Wong, P. T. P., & Wong, L. C. J. (under review). Meaning-Centered Positive Education (PE2.0) based on the new paradigm of Existential Positive Psychology (EPP). In G. Arslan & M. Yildirim (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive School Psychology Interventions: Evidence-Based Practice for Promoting Youth Mental Health*.