

The third wave of cultural psychology

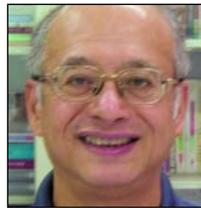
The indigenous movement

SINCE the end of World War II there have been three large-scale academic movements attempting to incorporate non-Western cultural factors into psychological research: modernisation theory, research on individualism/collectivism, and the indigenisation movement. These waves in cultural psychology have not risen randomly: what's fascinating is that they reflect the power structure of the scientific community as well as the power relationships between Western and non-Western countries. This article reviews the main ideas of these three academic movements as well as the sociohistorical background relevant to their incubation, in order to illuminate the epistemological implications of the emergence of the third wave, the indigenous movement. Is the new wave what we have been waiting for, or just more scientific ethnocentrism in disguise?

Modernisation theory

During World War II, most countries in Europe and Asia were seriously damaged, while the US was fortunate enough to escape devastation. After the war the US quickly became a superpower in the economic structure of the capitalist world. Compared with people in other countries, Americans enjoyed the most modern way of life at that time.

In the 1960s modernisation theory began to emerge in the American scientific community. Modernisation theory entails the belief that it is necessary to modernise the personalities, dispositions and psychological characteristics of individuals in any society, including Western ones, in order to facilitate modernisation of the state or nation. Inkeles (1966) of Harvard University was the first to advocate the idea of 'the modernization of man'. He conducted a series of empirical studies to identify the psychological characteristics of modernised people, developed an instrument for measuring them (Schnaiberg, 1970), made cross-national comparisons of those characteristics with



KWANG-KUO HWANG shows how psychological study has been inextricably linked with sociocultural history.

people from various developing countries, and studied the causes and consequences of becoming modern (Inkeles & Smith, 1974). His research paradigm has been followed by many psychologists. From the 1960s to 1970s numerous psychologists also tried to develop various versions of the modernity scale for use with empirical research in various non-Western societies (Armer & Youtz, 1971; Dawson, 1967; Doob, 1967; Guthrie, 1977; Inkeles, 1968; Yang, 1981; Yang & Hchu, 1974).

In the 1980s modernisation theory was criticised bitterly by the international scientific community. Many sociologists began to interrogate the connection

'the clash of civilisations has become a core issue'

between individual and social modernisation. They pointed out that the lifestyle of urban residents in the big cities of Latin America is highly modernised and similar to that in Western countries, even though their countries had not similarly progressed along the path of modernisation – in fact their politics and economics had deteriorated to a disadvantaged position in the world economic system. As a result of the rise of world system theory (Wallerstein, 1979), the tide of research on individual modernity gradually declined.

Modernisation theory is basically an American-centred academic construction. It construes Americans as having the highest degree of modernisation, the idea being that after experiencing a modernisation process, people in other cultures may become as modern as Americans. This kind of discourse reflects not only the power structure of the international scientific community at that time, but also the domination of American culture through capitalism.

Research on individualism/collectivism

By the 1980s the economic activities of Western European countries had mostly

recovered from the damage of World War II. Of the Asian countries, Japan had become the largest economic power in the trade system of the capitalist world. Other areas of the Asian-Pacific rim had also achieved remarkable economic performance. Although the world economic system is still dominated by the US, the scientific community of psychology has gradually shifted their concern to cultures other than that of the US. The emergence of research on individualism/collectivism reflects this subtle change during this period.

Dutch organisational sociologist Hofstede (1980) was the first to engage in research on this topic. While he was a research director at IBM, he developed a 32-item scale to measure work-goal or work-related values, and administered it to equivalent and stratified samples of IBM staff in 40 nations. He obtained average scores on the items for samples of each nation, calculated a correlation matrix among the average values for each nation on the 32 items, subjected it to factor analysis, and obtained four factors: namely, individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. He then mapped the 40 countries empirically by locating their factor scores along the four dimensions.

In the Western cultural tradition, individualism describes a world view antagonistic to collective social structure. Hofstede's (1980) idea of contrasting societies on the basis of differences in individualism has attracted earnest interest from the scientific community of psychology. An intensive review of empirical studies in the past 20 years indicated that psychologists have developed at least 27 distinct scales to measure individualism/collectivism (Oyserman *et al.*, 2002).

Researchers generally assume that individualism is the opposite of collectivism. Individualism is more prevalent in Western industrialised countries than other areas of the world, especially when compared with traditional

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societies in developing countries. The cultural tradition of Protestantism and the process of civic emancipation in Western societies constitutes a social structure that promotes formation of the psychological syndrome of individualism, such as individual freedom, right of choice, and self-actualisation (Triandis, 1995). Nations or ethnic groups with a tradition of Protestantism are characterised by a higher degree of individualism than other cultural groups. Americans scored highest on the dimension of individualism. Moreover, European Americans have a higher tendency towards individualism than other ethnic groups in the US, with a consequent lower tendency for collectivism than other minority groups (Oyserman *et al.*, 2002).

This approach is obviously a new version of modernisation theory. Both adopt the methodology of trait theory in attempting to reduce the complicated behavioural dispositions in various cultural contexts into the psychological dimensions of individualism/collectivism or individual modernity/individual traditionality, which can be assessed with a psychometric approach (Hwang, 2003a, 2000b; Yang, 2003). Though psychologists conducting research on individualism/collectivism might not assume that individuals of non-Western cultures may become 'modern people' like Americans after a process of modernisation, they still seem to be trying to construct a picture of other cultural groups by taking European Americans as a point of reference. That is, they locate European Americans at an extreme pole on

the dimension of individualism/collectivism. Their psychological characteristics are used as a framework for understanding people of other cultural groups around the world, who are scattered on different points along the same dimension. The specific features of the other cultures are blurred; their psychological characteristics can be recognised only by comparing them with Americans.

After an intensive review of previous research on this topic, Oyserman *et al.* (2002) suggested that American and Western psychology are infused with an understanding of human nature based on individualism. This worldview has been associated with Western religious, historical, political and economic traditions, and affects how we see the self, well-being, relationships, cognition and judgement. This raises the question of our ability to separate our current individualism-based way of understanding human nature from a yet-to-be-developed collectivism-based approach.

Fiske (2002) criticised the individualism/collectivism approach and pointed out that individualism is the concatenation of features that Americans define as their own culture, while collectivism is an abstraction that formalises American ideological representation of the antithetical other – 'a cultural vision of the rest of the world characterized in terms of what we imagine we are not' (p.84).

In opposition to this approach,

Kitayama (2002) advocated a system view of culture, and suggested development of culture-dependent models that illustrate functional relations among variables in different domains. Miller (2002) also suggested adopting a contextually grounded view for studying cultural impact on psychological functioning. Their viewpoints are very similar to the perspective of indigenous psychologists, which we turn to now.

The indigenisation movement

Since the end of the 1970s, some psychologists have begun conducting research on the indigenous psychology of non-Western countries, such as Mexico, Korea, Japan, the Philippines and India. This trend attracted increasing attention from mainstream psychologists in the 1990s. The emergence of indigenous psychology can be understood as a search by non-Western psychologists for cultural identity in the power structure of the new world order.

At the beginning of the 1990s the communist regimes of Eastern Europe collapsed, the long-lasting Cold War between East and West that had persisted since the end of World War II came to an end, and many previously communist countries began to participate to a far greater extent in the world market of capitalism. In Asia, the People's Republic of China, whose leaders had been devoted to economic reform since the mid-1970s, also began to engage fully with capitalist international trade. Chinese products have deeply penetrated world markets, and China's huge population also constitutes an attractive market for most international businesses. Globalisation has become an inevitable trend, and the concept of multiculturalism has accordingly been proposed as globalisation's opposite but matching concept. People need to understand people from various different cultures, and yet they also need to seek their own cultural identities. As a consequence of frequent cultural contact, the possibility of intercultural conflict has also increased. Various types of interracial or international conflict have broken out in many regions around the world, and the clash of civilisations has become a core issue for human beings – and psychology – to resolve in the new age of globalisation (Huntington, 1997).

Indigenous psychology has emerged in this new power structure of world politics



and economy. Generally speaking, indigenisation movements have been initiated by non-Western psychologists in a spirit of nationalism and academic anticolonialism. They have argued that current mainstream psychology is basically a kind of Westernised or Americanised psychology. Both its theory and research methods contain Western ethnocentric bias (Berry *et al.*, 1992). When the research paradigm of Western psychology is transplanted blindly to non-Western countries, without adequate modification to fit the local cultures, it is usually irrelevant, inappropriate, or incompatible for understanding the mentalities of non-Western people. Such a practice has been regarded as a kind of academic imperialism or colonialism.

Therefore, many indigenous psychologists have advocated the scientific study of human behaviour and mental processes within a culturally meaningful context through a bottom-up model-building paradigm. The goal is a culturally appropriate psychology, based on indigenous realities, or a psychology that relies on native values, concepts, belief systems, problems, methods, and other resources (Kim & Berry, 1993). Yet indigenous psychology has been criticised by mainstream psychologists, who argue that the indigenous approach is nothing

more than the methodology used by anthropologists. Accumulation of anthropological data with an idiosyncratic approach may not have much significance in terms of contribution to the development of scientific psychology (Triandis, 2000). On the one hand, transplantation of a Western research paradigm to the study of the psychology of a native people might be culturally blind and fall into the trap of Western ethnocentrism. But on the other, if each culture develops its own psychology, an overemphasis on the nature and extent of cultural differences in psychological functioning might lead to scientific ethnocentrism in a new guise (Poortinga, 1996). Such one-sided emphasis with an ignorance of the invariance in psychological functioning is not only factually incorrect, but also theoretically misleading (Poortinga, 1999).

These epistemological challenges represent academic tensions that might be encountered by non-Western psychologists in developing indigenous psychologies within a Western context (Shams, 2002). Such psychologists can find themselves trapped, owing to the fact that the philosophy of conducting scientific research in psychology is a product of Western civilisation. Non-Western psychologists have to digest the essentials of Western civilisation so

as to produce scientific knowledge about the people of their own culture. They may publish works in local journals in their native language (for example, see Sinha, 2002), but paradoxically, if they want to be accepted by the international scientific community, they have to be familiar with the Western philosophy of science and be able to deal with its epistemological challenges.

Conclusion

The emergence of indigenous psychology is a result of the modernisation of non-Western intellectuals. The process of modernisation enables non-Western researchers to depict the psychology of their people in a scientific way. Various cultures around the world may have a different pace in developing their own indigenous psychology. They may have a long way to go before they are able to attain the final goal of a global psychology through an indigenous approach. However, as a consequence of the third wave of cultural psychology, social scientists may obtain an increasingly clear picture of how the human mind operates in different cultural contexts.

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