

## Eastern Psychologies

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The term “Eastern Psychologies” cannot be found in *WIKIPEDIA*. Instead, there is an entry on “Asian Psychology” which refers to a “movement”:

Asian psychologists wanted to have an expanding role in the science of psychology, but felt limited due to the heavy western influence. Predominant figures in Asian psychology are Quicheng Jing in China, Hiroshi Azuma in Japan, Ku-Shu Yang in Taiwan, and Durganand Sinha in India. (*WIKIPEDIA*)

In an essay entitled “Asian psychology coming of age,” Kitayama (2007) reports that Asian psychology has contributed greatly in the last two decades to the theories and database of psychology. At first blush, the Asian psychology movement seems to have accomplished its goal, namely, having an expanding role in mainstream psychology. However, the full potential of Asian psychology cannot be adequately addressed without taking into account its ghost identity as Eastern psychologies.

An overview of Eastern psychologies needs to start with their historical roots in Orientalism, which is defined by Said (1978) as “a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (p. 6). Viewed in the historical context of Orientalism, Asian psychology may derive from Eastern psychologies a fuller identity for the following reasons: First, the “East” is not confined geographically to the Far East. Second, one symbolic identity of the East that remains consistent throughout history is that it constitutes “one of . . . [the West’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said,

1978, p. 1). As such, the East refers to all non-Western cultures, otherwise known as the Majority world. This explains why the so-called Asian Psychology “movement” is generally known as Indigenous Psychology (hereafter, IP) (e.g., Kim, Yang, and Hwang, 2006) that was initiated by Asian leaders such as Ku-Shu Yang, Paranjpe, and others but has as its goal the advancement of global psychology, not just Asian psychology.

## **The Long Shadows of Orientalism**

“The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony . . .” (Said, 1978, p. 5).

### ***Psychology’s Construction of Culture***

Culture is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that admits to multiple definitions (Cohen, 2009), all of which can be useful depending on the research agenda. In psychology, culture tends to be constructed along the axis of prediction and control, an approach that focuses on culture as “the primary shaper and molder of everyone’s behavior” (Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998, p. 1107). It is in this framework that values and beliefs gain importance as the causal factors of behavior. This behavioral approach can be compared with the epistemic or semiotic approach to culture more commonly used by anthropologists. In semiotics terms, cultural beliefs are signs that point beyond themselves to a larger reality—an interpretative framework referred to by Taylor (1997) as the “moral map,” which is the “horizon” of significance, or “a background of intelligibility” (p. 37).

Take for instance sleeping arrangements across cultures. The behavioral approach would predict a causal connection between patterns of parent-child co-sleeping and beliefs and values that fall under Collectivism and interdependent self construals. As causal factors, however, these collectivistic values and beliefs lack the existential thickness that is found in the study of sleeping patterns across cultures by a cultural anthropologist, who claims that “behavior per se is not what the action is about. The family order is part of the social order, which is part of the moral order . . .” (Shweder, 2003, p. 73).

The behavioral approach to culture, while useful for many practical purposes (see Segall, et al., 1998), has the unintended consequences of being susceptible to the power and domination of cultural imperialism.

### ***The “White Man’s Burden”***

Implicit in the prediction and control approach to culture is an asymmetrical relationship between two terms, A and B. A refers to psychology or science, whereas B, culture or folk theories. The asymmetrical relationship-- which posits that A studies B, but is not part of B-- is made possible by a blind sight of the embeddedness of A in B. This asymmetrical relationship between psychology and culture or science and folk theories is the basis for the assumption that psychological categories, such as gender or the brain, are superior to cultural categories, such as values and beliefs, in that the former are the correct or potentially universal answers to universal questions, in comparison to the local answers from indigenous cultures. This position is a continuation of Orientalism, with cultural superiority thinly disguised by the authority of science.

One consequence of cultural imperialism is “the white man’s burden” which refers to a sense of obligation on the part of the superior culture of the West to enlighten the non-western cultures about their misguided beliefs, a position otherwise known as the “civilizing mission” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 378). A case in point is the claim by Segall, et al. (1998) that psychological research on gender can reduce the victimization of women in certain cultures by “break[ing] the stranglehold of outmoded beliefs about the basis of differences between the sexes” (p. 1107). Cautioning against the haste with which the West condemns the culturally endorsed practices of little known others, Shweder (2003) points out the “totalitarian implications” of “the doctrine that our gender ideals are best . . . and moreover, good for everyone” (p. 197).

Another legacy of Orientalism is the persistent East and West comparison, which suggests a binary vision of the world:

Throughout the exchange between Europeans and their “others” that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an “us” and a “them,” each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident. (Said, 1993, p. xxv)

One of the consequences of this comparative mode is to cast the East in the role of antithesis to the West, a role that the Orient “has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said, 1978, pp. 1-2). Comparison for contrast can lead to a biased representation of the Other.

### ***Culture as Absence***

. . . in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence. (Said, 1978, p. 208)

In passing through the grid of Orientalism to reach the consciousness of the West, the East gets its genuine culture screened out. Genuine culture may be understood as an inventory of the cultural resources for autonomy and vitality. In the words of Sapir (1924): “a genuine culture is one that gives its bearers a sense of inner satisfaction, a feeling of spiritual mastery” (p. 420). Sapir further defines (genuine) culture as “an outgrowth of the collective spiritual *effort* of man” (1924, p. 403, emphasis added). The key term here is “effort.” Sapir emphasizes the “spiritual primacy of the individual soul” (p. 424), which must learn to reconcile its own strivings with the spiritual life of the community, such that “if not embrace the whole spiritual life of its group, at least catch enough of its rays to burst into light and flame” (p. 424).

Genuine culture may be operationally defined as ideals and aspirations that apply across contexts, and inspire continuous striving for excellence. Applying this yardstick of genuine culture to the values and beliefs in the Individualism-Collectivism scale (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995)—a measure most widely used in cross cultural psychology-- reveals some interesting observations.

Four out of sixteen (25%) items of Individualism (Singelis, et al., p. 255) meet the criteria of genuine culture as operationally defined above:

“I am a unique individual”;

“I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways”;

“Winning is everything”;

“It is important that I do my job better than others.”

By contrast, none of the items under Collectivism meets these criteria, due to the fact that they are all context specific, such as “I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group” (p. 256). Furthermore, empirical evidence is accumulating that these collectivistic values of compromise and self-effacement are not necessarily personal aspirations, but rather externally driven concerns to take socially wise action, and to avoid socially unwise behavior (Yamagishi, 2011). Sapir (1924) refers to practices that are based on “an automatic perpetuation of standardized values” (p. 418) as “external” or spurious culture (p. 412), in contrast to the internally driven genuine culture.

This slippage across the West and East divide from life to data, from ideals and strivings characteristic of a genuine culture to beliefs and practices that are confined to one (social) dimension only, and that pertain to social compliance more than personal strivings is nothing new. Hook (2005) has observed a recurring slippage between “the ideals, the norms of the valorized Western culture, and those of the dominated culture, which comes to be the demoted *other* of all of these values” (p. 481, emphasis in original). One of the ramifications of being identified with demoted values is to “accept some miniature version of yourself as a doctrine [such as collectivism] to be passed out on a course syllabus” (Said, 1993, p. 334).

What are the living values, in the collectivistic societies, of a genuine culture that give the bearers a sense of vitality, inner satisfaction, and spiritual mastery across all contexts? Do collectives have any internally driven strivings that endeavor to “burst into light and flame” (Sapir, 1924, p. 424) when ignited by some cultural values? The answer to these questions is a resounding yes: notions of self cultivation and emotion refinement (Frijda and Sundararajan, 2007); detachment and *moksha* (Bhawuk, 2011), *Satori* or *wu* (Li, in press), to name just a few. But none of these beliefs and values make it to the items of Collectivism.

## Future Directions

### *Self representation as De-alienation*

Absence of genuine culture in the Western representation of the Other has far reaching ramifications. Biko has addressed in depth the systematic marginalization of the cultural resources through which the black psyche had traditionally attained “autonomy and vitality” (Hook, 2005, p. 489). A continuation of this theme is the sense of alienation experienced by Yang (1997) who refers to the Westernized research process that fails to adequately reflect the Chinese cultural values and ways of thinking as an imposed “soulless psychology” (p. 65).

In response to alienation, IP’s are highly invested in “an assertion of presence—or voice—that had been previously muted and not given the space in which to speak” (Hook, 2005, p. 496). A case in point is the edited volume on *Asian Contributions to Psychology* (Paranjpe, Ho, and Rieber, 1988), which consists of the presentations of subtlety and sensitivity in the Filipino social interaction by Mataragnon, *Yuan* (the notion of predestined relationship) by Yang and Ho, Buddhist psychology by Rao, yoga and *vedānta* by Paranjpe and others. To the extent that these topics deal with values that have set countless souls on fire for centuries in these traditions, they attest to the resurgence of genuine culture in the self representations of the East.

### *Toward a New Vision of Global Psychology*

The prevalent model of global psychology is basically an expanded version of mainstream psychology (MP), in which Western psychology serves as the blueprint for global psychology, with non-western psychologies working out some local details. This model of global psychology is not feasible because it continues the hegemony of the West, which

determines both research interests as well as the norm of performance (Bhatia, 2002), and which poses an intrinsic constraint on the potential contributions of non-western cultures to psychology.

This intrinsic constraint may be traced back to two practices of Orientalism-- domestication and scientific study of the East. Domestication of the Other is evidenced by the “many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use” (Said, 1978, p. 4). A case in point is a branch of Buddhist psychology known as mindfulness, the impact of which is confined mainly to clinical practices in the West, leaving the theory and research of mainstream psychology unscathed, even though there have been rumors of mindfulness posing a challenge to some fundamental assumptions of MP (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

Using religion as an example, Rosch (2002) rightly identifies the asymmetrical claims of science as the main factor that prevents the two way flow of knowledge between science and culture, as she puts it, “modern psychology, like modern politicians, seems able only to talk *at* religions rather than to listen to them” (p. 37, emphasis in the original). Lamenting the one way flow of knowledge, Rosch (2002) wonders whether science can continue to allow:

. . . the understanding of the human mind to be left solely to the pre-existing conceptualizations and latest fashions of our incipient psychology, with no contribution from the thousands of years of worldwide religious practice and observation? (p. 38)

From this perspective, solution to the problems faced by the non-western psychologies lies not in having a bigger piece of the MP pie, but rather in having a different pie all together.

## *An IP-Based Vision of Global Psychology*

An IP-based vision of global psychology is succinctly outlined by Yang (1997):

. . . the shortest road leading to this overall human psychology should be through the establishment of representative indigenous psychologies all over the world. Such a human psychology would never be accomplished by relying upon one single dominant indigenous psychology, American psychology (or the broader Western psychology). Instead, local psychologies in various societies should develop their own respective indigenous psychologies, which would then be gradually integrated to form a genuine global psychology. (p. 70)

This vision of global psychology has a three-tiered structure: First, equal partnership to all, second, integration of IP's, and last, an emergent global community of psychology.

### Equal Partnership

This entails that Western psychology will acknowledge itself as IP on a par with other IP's. This can be accomplished through the reflexive consciousness that renders visible the cultural roots of science. Only a science that is aware of its roots in culture and history is a candidate for true collaboration in the global community of psychology, as Bhatia (2002) points out:

A truly meaningful collaboration between Western and Third World psychologists will . . . need to begin with the acknowledgment of their shared history within the context of Orientalism in colonial times and cultural imperialism in the postcolonial era. (p. 395).

## Integration of IP's

In the 1990 convention of the American Psychological Association, new research on the kind of men women find attractive was featured as an important item for the press, whereas Noam Chomsky's presentation on the sociopolitical meaning of the assassination of Martin-Baró was not (Martin-Baró, 1994). That psychological topics reflect preoccupations of the contemporary West has its counterpart in other IP's. For instance, Yang (1997) proposed a text book on general psychology for the Chinese students to cover mainly Chinese psychology, "with theories and findings from foreign indigenous psychologies (for example, American psychology) included only for comparative purposes" (p. 74). This is precisely the agenda followed by mainstream psychology, if we switch the terms around, "Chinese" for "American" in Yang's proposal. This attests to the insight of Yang that global psychology cannot be an expanded version of any particular IP, but is rather an emergent phenomenon different from all the contributing IP's.

Yang did not spell out the transformation process, referred to as "integration," from ethnocentric IP's to global psychology. There are at least two possibilities that fall along the divide between the two versions of harmony, the classical Chinese notions and their simplistic interpretations in the cross cultural literature (Sundararajan, under review). The simplistic version of harmony describes the unifying discourse of MP-based version of global psychology, which capitalizes on top down processes of regulation toward greater unity and uniformity. By contrast, the classical Chinese notions of harmony capitalize on the inherent self-regulatory mechanisms of the system, referred to by the Chinese as the yin yang balance. On this classical view of harmony, global psychology is an emergent phenomenon that evolves from the mutual

synergy and mutual constraint of all IP's competing with one another as equals, each with unique strength of its own. This approach to integration via the balancing of opposing forces of yin and yang has been successfully applied to management (Li, in press).

### Global Psychology and a New Narrative of Culture

It is difficult to predict the new Heaven and new Earth that emerge out of the truly global community of psychology. One transformation, however, can be expected, namely a new narrative of culture. Contrary to the static dichotomies, such as Individualism versus Collectivism, prevalent in cross cultural psychology, cultures change, sometimes rapidly (Fang, 2010). What “the exilic, the marginal, subjective, migratory energies of modern life” (Said, 1993, p. 334) need is a new narrative which validates the freedom of the self to transform or reject its own culture, to belong to multiple cultures, and to “transcend the restraints of imperial or national or provincial limits” (Said, 1993, p. 335). Such a narrative can be developed along the lines of genuine culture, defined by Sapir (1924) as a manifestation of life that has no borders, and of the human spirit which is inherently free:

. . . those . . . of us who take their culture neither as knowledge nor as manner, but as life, will ask of the past not so much “what?” and “when?” and “where?” as “how?” and the accent of their “how” will be modulated in accordance with the needs of the spirit of each, a spirit that is free to glorify, to transform, and to reject. (p. 423)

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