

Symposium: **The Changing Landscape of Collectivism in East Asia**

Chair: Louise Sundararajan

Sponsored by Divisions 52 (International) and 8(Social and Personality)

Date & Time: Thu 8/9/2018 10:00 AM - 11:50 AM

Location: Moscone Center Room 154

Abstract

With the global rise of individualism as documented by many researchers (e.g., Santos, Varnum, & Grossmann, 2017), what happens to collectivism in the traditionally interdependent societies? An international panel will address this question, with special focus on two consequences of globalization: a. the impact of global economy on the traditionally collectivistic societies; b. implications of the changing landscape of collectivism for cross cultural psychology. The first speaker will present results from empirical studies to show that rising individualism is related to decrease in psychological well-being in the rural, more collectivistic, areas of China. The second speaker will present an empirical study of the devastating impact of urbanization on two religious ethnic minority groups of Yi in the high mountains of Southwest China. Since both Yi groups belong to rural and collectivistic societies, the findings cannot be meaningfully explained by the framework of Individualism-Collectivism prevalent in cross cultural psychology. The third speaker presents empirical studies on the Japanese super-ordinary bias (better-than- average in being ordinary). The results also challenge the Individualism-Collectivism dichotomy which has contributed to the cultural stereotyping of the Japanese as the antithesis of the self-aggrandizing West (Heine, et al., 1999). Presenting multi-nations findings on cross-temporal shifts in societal values of collectivism, gender equality, and other phenomena, and the role of ecological factors in these shifts, the fourth speaker suggests several ways to integrate evolutionary and cultural psychological perspectives to gain a more complete picture of and better prediction for cultural change. The Discussant will review the findings to call attention to the urgent need for a more ecologically sensitive model of culture to a. keep pace with the changing landscape of collectivism in the globalizing era; and b. heed the suffering of those populations who don't seem to be changing fast enough for the hegemonic global economy.

Presenters:

1. Michael Shengtao Wu
2. Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting
3. Susumu Yamaguchi, University of Tokyo
4. Igor Grossmann

Discussant: Louise Sundararajan

#1.

Individualism and emotional wellbeing: Mismatch of cultures in rural China

Michael Shengtao Wu^{1,*}, *Hao Chen*², *Chan Zhou*³, *Huajian Cai*⁴, *Louise Sandararajan*⁵

1 Institute of Communication, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China

2 School of Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, Tianjin 300350, China

3 School of Psychology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

4 Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100101, China

5 Independent Researcher, Rochester, NY, USA

Abstract

China is witnessing a rise in individualism in the aftermath of its phenomenal economic growth. Will this increasing individualism lead to more happiness? Two studies were designed to examine the relationship between individualism and emotional wellbeing in China at individual and group levels. Our prediction was that individualism would be associated with positive emotions in urban areas in which individualism (vs. collectivism) is adaptive, but with negative emotions in rural areas in which collectivism (vs. individualism) is adaptive. At the individual level, Study 1 showed that self-reported individualism was negatively related to positive emotions but positively related to negative emotions among Chinese college students from rural areas, while the relationship between individualism and positive/ negative emotions was not significant among those from urban areas. In Study 2, an analysis of the 1.6 millions Chinese Micro-Blog users' 38,067,602 posts revealed that the province-level individualism scores, via subjective estimates or objective measures, were not significantly related to the frequency of using positive emotions (e.g., happiness) or negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, disgust, and fear) in higher urbanized provinces, whereas the province-level individualism scores were negatively related to positive emotions but positively related to negative emotions in lower urbanized provinces. In sum, these studies suggest the psychological cost of individualism (less happiness) among Chinese in rural areas in which there is a cultural mismatch between individualism/collectivism and agriculture/market ecology.

#2

Seeing modern China through the lens of the Yi

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting, PhD

China University of Political Sciences and Law

Abstract

In cross-cultural psychology, China tends to be plotted at the far end of the collectivism continuum. Seldom have psychologists bothered to look into the immense diversity among the Chinese, who are comprised of 56 ethnic groups (Yi being the 7th largest), each with a unique ecology, ethnic identity, language and religion. The dichotomous framework of individualism-collectivism cannot capture these differences, nor can it measure the varying degrees of adjustment to globalization among these groups. To illustrate this point, I present a mixed method study on two Yi ethnic groups in Southwest China. We compared two groups of Yi--one group were converted to Christianity five generations ago; the other still following the traditional Bimo religion (a form of animism). Due to urbanization in the past 20 years, one-fourth of the Yi population from Liangshan area migrated to coastal cities as cheap labors. The Yi-Bimo group suffered much from migrant work. It challenged their collective identity that was grounded in family clan and ancestor worship, resulting in a loss of moral compass and emotional regulation that contributed to problems of addiction, and HIV transmission. The Christian Yi, by contrast, fared better. Although both groups share in common their reliance on family and friends as support network (collectivism), the Christian group reached out to non-blood-related outsiders for help more often than the traditional Bimo group. The lens of collectivism-individualism fails to shed any light on this significant difference between the groups, nor on the modern Chinese hybridized cultural identities, which are caught in the buffeting winds of modernization on the one hand, and attachment to one's cultural roots on the other. Our results suggest that a better explanatory tool would be Granovetter's theory of strong-ties vs weak-ties cast in the framework of ecological rationality (Todd et al., 2012) as suggested by Sundararajan (2015).

#3

In what sense are Japanese collectivistic? A case of super-ordinary bias

Susumu Yamaguchi, University of Tokyo (Emeritus Professor)

Megumi M. Ohashi, Tokyo Future University

Abstract

According to mainstream psychology, individualistic North Americans value being unique and positively distinguished, whereas Japanese have a tendency to be modest rather than unique, which can be interpreted as a reflection of collectivistic value. We have demonstrated in our previous studies that Japanese tend to perceive themselves as being extremely ordinary, so much so that their self-predictions about future life events are biased toward ordinariness (super-ordinary bias). We have also shown that the tendency is not restricted in estimation of future life events. This phenomenon, which is apparently the opposite of the need for uniqueness prevalent in North America, can be an example of the pursuit of positive self-esteem among Japanese. Japanese may take a different route to achieve their positive self-evaluation: other than becoming uniquely positive. Rather than seeking personal happiness (at

the cost of other people), Japanese value maintaining harmonious relationships with important others, which result in emphasizing ordinariness and similarity with others. Thus, being ordinary is perceived to be socially desirable and valued as such. We expected and showed that such positive notion about being ordinary would lead people to value being ordinary and seek their uniqueness in terms of being ordinary (super-ordinary effect). Apparently, Japanese (and probably Asians in general) have another motivation toward being ordinary. Our data indicate that Japanese can attain positive self-evaluation by being super-ordinary. (Supposedly) collectivist Japanese appear to seek for uniqueness in terms of being ordinary. Are they really collectivist? I will discuss individualist motivations underlying collectivist behaviors among Japanese.

#4

Cultural change in collectivism around the world: An Overview

Igor Grossmann, University of Waterloo, CA

Michael Varnum, Arizona State University, USA

Recent political events in the US, Western Europe, Middle East, as well as East and South-east Asia highlight how fluid societal norms and values can be. A growing body of evidence suggests that culture is not static, but studies that map out cross-cultural and cross-temporal differences fail to capture the processes and antecedents of cultural change. We discuss recent insights about temporal shifts in cultural values, attitudes, and behavior, shedding light on the processes and antecedents of cultural change. We suggest that the integration of evolutionary and cultural perspectives on societal change informs what brings about cultural shifts and how to predict them. The cultural evolution framework examines how culture changes by looking at the transmission of cultural content to future generations. The ecological approach investigates why cultures change by looking at the ecological pressures that promote these shifts. We will particularly reflect on our recent findings examining cross-temporal shifts in societal values of collectivism, gender equality, and other phenomena, and the role of ecological factors in these shifts. We observe these changes in the US, as well as in the majority of 77 other countries we tested across the globe. We conclude by suggesting several ways to integrate evolutionary and cultural psychological perspectives to gain a more complete picture of cultural change and how to predict it in the coming decades.