

Outside Observer vs. Inside Doer: Divergent Perspectives on “Culture” in the Indigenization Movement of Psychology

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Abstract

In his rejoinder to [my article](#), “Preserving cultural identity and subjectivity for a psychology of multiculturalism,” Allwood (2014a) proposed a series of questions awaiting further clarification. A careful examination of his questions indicates that most of them can be attributed to the divergent standpoints between us. As an outside observer to the indigenization movement of psychology, Allwood (2014b, c) concerns about “an appropriate *culture concept* for the indigenous psychologies,” “what type of culture concept will help the indigenous psychologies?” But, as president of the Asian Association of Indigenization Movement of Psychology for more than thirty years, my ultimate concern is how to construct culture-inclusive theories for psychology of multiculturalism in the age of globalization (Hwang 2013a, b; 2014). The culture-inclusive theories of psychology constructed in accordance with “One mind, many mentalities” (Shweder et al. 1998), the principle of cultural psychology, may enable IPists to conduct empirical research on related culture concepts in any given society.

Introduction

Allwood (2014) stated his position clearly in his rejoinder:

A culture concept likely to be more useful in practical social work would emphasize the importance of variation in understanding, thus the importance of identifying the typical understanding of various categories (social classes, professions, age-groups, genders, etc.) and intersections between categories (e.g., younger blue collar work men, older men, etc.) of people in a society. This, in order to get as close as possible to the understanding of the specific individuals that are the target for the social help-intervention. In brief, a culture concept, such as the one I argue for, that emphasizes that understanding is distributed in a society, rather than that it is shared would seem to be a more useful culture concept for the indigenous psychologies. (Allwood 2014, 32)

Culture as a Thorny Concept

As an outside observer to the movement, Allwood argues for a culture concept that the understanding of the specific individuals “is distributed in a society, rather than it is shared.” But as a pioneer and insider who has been seeking for the solution for the

indigenization movement of psychology, I insist that IPists have to construct culture-inclusive theories first by considering what “is shared” by the majority of a culture group (Hwang 2013a), before conducting empirical research to understand how related culture concepts are distributed in a society. Without the assistance of culture-inclusive theories, non-Western empirical research in psychology will be dominated by Western theories of mainstream psychology.

Regarding Prof. Allwood’s position as an outside observer, I would like to indicate that culture is not something like a *variable* which can be measured and handled easily by statistical methods. On the contrary, it is a thorny concept which is too vague and too broad for psychologists to study. For instance, some cultural psychologists may conceptualize culture as something external to an individual:

[we] **think of** culture as a dynamically changing environment that is transformed by the artefacts created by prior generations...an artifact is an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal-directed human thought and action...an artifact is simultaneously ideal (conceptual) and material. It is material in that it is embodied in physical form, whether in the morphology of a spoken, written or signed word, a ritual, or an artistic creation, or as a solid object like a pencil. It is ideal in that this material form has been shaped by historical participation in (successful, adaptive) human activities... culture can be seen as the medium of human development which [prepares humans] for interaction with the world. (Cole & Parker 2011, 135)

And cross-cultural psychologists may conceptualize culture as internal and external:

...culture as networks of knowledge consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other people, as well as a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world... it is ... shared..., among a collection of interconnected individuals who are often demarcated by race, ethnicity, or nationality; (b) externalized by rich symbols, artefacts, social constructions, and social institutions (e.g., cultural icons, advertisements and news media); (c) used to form the common ground for communication among members; (d) transmitted from one generation to the next...; (e) undergoing continuous modifications...(Hong 2009, 4)

Some Picky Critiques

In the face of such a thorny concept, Prof. Allwood is rather picky about my culture concept as he did not show much sympathetic understanding about the problematic situation to be dealt with by us IPists. When I stated that language is the most important carrier of culture, [he asked](#):

...it also remains unclear what other cultural “carriers” Prof. Hwang is comparing with when he says that language is the most important cultural carrier, is he comparing with buildings and other human material artifacts, human conceptions, or what? (Allwood 2014a, 31)

When I mentioned all cultural traditions that can be transmitted from generation to generation serve some function of helping people in a certain situation in the lifeworld, he argued:

Surely much unhelpful cultural content has been “transmitted from generation to generation”! Of course, a further problem here is what is meant by the vague expression “some function of helping people”. Here Prof. Hwang seems to take a somewhat naïve functionalistic view of the usefulness of traditional cultural content. (Allwood 2014a, 31)

When I said that “most people act daily according to the cultural heritage,” he criticized:

Professor Hwang does not seem to be interested in recognizing the difference between “tradition” (cultural heritage) and other types of cultural content, namely such contents that have not been conveyed from previous generations in the society but have been added to the current culture within the current generation, coming either from outside of the society or being created by the current generation in the society. Given this distinction, how does he know that “most people act daily according to the cultural heritage” and not also typically according to other types of cultural contents? (Allwood 2014a, 31)

Two Steps of Psychological Research

In view of the fact that giving a comprehensive definition of culture has long been a thorny problem in the history of psychology, I can understand that it is not difficult for Prof. Allwood to be so picky about my culture concept. It is a matter of course that culture is more than tradition, but it is not easy for an outside observer to understand why an inside doer of indigenous psychology has to focus his attention on his own cultural heritage. As an outside observer, anyone may ask IPists to accomplish a mission impossible and to draw a complete picture of culture. As an inside doer of indigenous psychology, I fully understand the one-sidedness of social science (Weber, 1949) and emphasize that IPists should focus their attention on those parts of culture which had been ignored by Western-trained psychologists. Obviously, Prof. Allwood does not seem to be aware of the divergent interests between outside observers and inside doers of the IP movement when he stated:

A feature of Prof. Hwang's culture concept that makes it a poor candidate to be useful for the people in the indigenous researchers' societies is that it emphasizes the understanding in a society that is shared (expressed in statistical terms: it emphasizes the central tendencies of the understanding in a society, not the variation), and thus does not pay attention to the variation of the understanding prevalent in a society. (Allwood, 2014a, 32)

This is the most serious misunderstanding of Prof. Allwood. In fact, any psychological research consists of two steps: theoretical construction and empirical research. Emphasizing the shared understanding in a society is a necessary task for constructing culture-inclusive theories in psychology (Hwang 2013a), while studying the variation of the understanding prevalent in a society is the major task of empirical research.

Elusive Goal of Psychology

Let me elaborate my research program in more detail : In my earlier article entitled *Linking Science to Culture: Challenge to Psychologists* ([Hwang 2013b](#)), I emphasized that the indigenization movement of psychology is destined to solve a thorny problem which has been neglected by Western psychologists since the founding of scientific psychology. When Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) established his laboratory in Leipzig in 1879, he conducted experiments on “lower cognitive functions” using the method of controlled introspection on consciousness. He described his approach and research findings in *Principle of Physiological Psychology* (Wundt 1874/1904). Recognizing the restriction of this approach to understand “higher forms of human intellect and creativity” as represented in culture, he studied cultural issues in his volumes of *Völkerpsychologie* by historical methods (Wundt 1916).

Soon after the launching of scientific psychology, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), a young Russian psychologist who was profoundly influenced by Western thoughts, also distinguished “lower” from “higher” psychological processes in 1927 for the sake of differentiating men from animals in phylogenetic continuity. Based on the distinction between “explanation of nature” and “understanding of human actions” formulated by Dilthey and Münsterberg, Vygotsky also distinguished two types of psychology: Causal psychology as a natural science aimed to study the cause-and-effect of lower psychological processes, and intentional psychology as a “spiritualistic” one aimed to understand human intentions as well as actions (Vygotsky 1927/ 1987).

Because of his premature death at the age of 38, and because his work was criticized by the Communist Party in Russia, while Vygotsky was a contemporary of Pavlov, Freud and Piaget, his work never attained their level of eminence during his lifetime. Thus, the so-called intentional psychology has been relatively ignored by mainstream psychologists.

Cultural psychologist Cole (1996) indicated the problematic situation left by Wundt:

In recent years interest has grown in Wundt's "second psychology," the one to which he assigned the task of understanding how culture enters into psychological processes . . . My basic thesis is that the scientific issues Wundt identified were not adequately dealt with by the scientific paradigm that subsequently dominated psychology and other behavioral-social sciences. . . cultural-inclusive psychology has been . . . an elusive goal. (1996, 7-8)

Culture-inclusive Theories of Psychology

Because most Western theories of psychology emphasize the causality of human behavior, rather than its intentionality, an important reason IPists are dissatisfied with Western theories of psychology is their ignorance of the simple fact that human beings are able to understand, predict, change and control their environment, others in their environment, and themselves (e.g. Kim, Yang, & Hwang 2006, 10). Therefore, Kashima (2005, 35) reminded IPists to adopt a view that "...intentionality is materially realized (and) meaning is part of a causal chain...."

In order to solve the problematic situation left by Wundt and to integrate both scientific psychology and intentional psychology as suggested by Vygotsky, in the first chapter of my book, *Foundations of Chinese Psychology* (Hwang 2012), I advocated that the epistemological goal of indigenous psychology is to construct a series of culture-inclusive theories to represent not only the universal mind of human beings but also the particular mentality of people within a given society in accordance with the principle of cultural psychology: "one mind, many mentalities" (Shweder et al. 1998). This principle indicates that the construction of culture-inclusive theory contains two steps. First, constructing a model to represent the psychological functioning or mechanisms of the human mind. Second, using this model to analyze a particular cultural heritage (Hwang 2014). In Chapter 4 of my book, I explained how I constructed the theoretical model of "*Face and Favor*" which represents the universal mechanism for social interaction, then I used it to analyze the inner structure of Confucianism and discussed its attributes in terms of Western ethics. In the remaining chapters of that book, I constructed a series of culture-inclusive theories of social psychology on the presumption of relationalism, which had been utilized to integrate previous empirical research findings on social exchange, face, achievement motivation, organizational behaviors, and conflict resolution in Confucian society.

In his rejoinder to my article, Allwood (2014a) explained his position:

When I wrote that Prof. Hwang's advice to the IPs to use his culture concept and research philosophy (imported from a culture outside of the IP societies) would risk changing the IPs out of recognition, I meant that this would go against a central tenant in the IPs research program, namely

that they should be founded on their own cultural premises, and, in this sense, risked changing them out of recognition. However, what I wanted to say does not appear to have been picked up by Prof. Hwang. Hopefully it is now clear what I meant. (Allwood 2014a, 32)

I have indicated several times that philosophy of science is mainly a product of Western civilization (e. g. Evenden and Sandstrom 2011). My research philosophy originated from Western culture, but I used my research strategy to construct culture-inclusive theories in a particular non-Western society (Hwang 2013a). The same strategy can also be applied to other non-Western societies. This kind of culture-inclusive theories are certainly founded on their own cultural premises. I don't think that my research program risked changing them (non-Western cultures) out of recognition (unclear).

Mandala Model of Self

In Chapter 1 of another book, *A Proposal for Scientific Revolution in Psychology* (Hwang 2011a), I also proposed a *Mandala Model of Self* as another universal model of human mind that may be used to study mentalities in any specific culture. Though I mentioned it in my previous debates with Prof. Allwood (Hwang 2013b), here I would like to elaborate on it in order to clarify some of Allwood's questions.

The focus of the *Mandala model* is the action taken by an individual in the lifeworld (see Figure 1). *Self* in this model refers to a socialized agent with reflexivity whose lifeworld can be represented by a mandala with the structure of a circle inside a square.

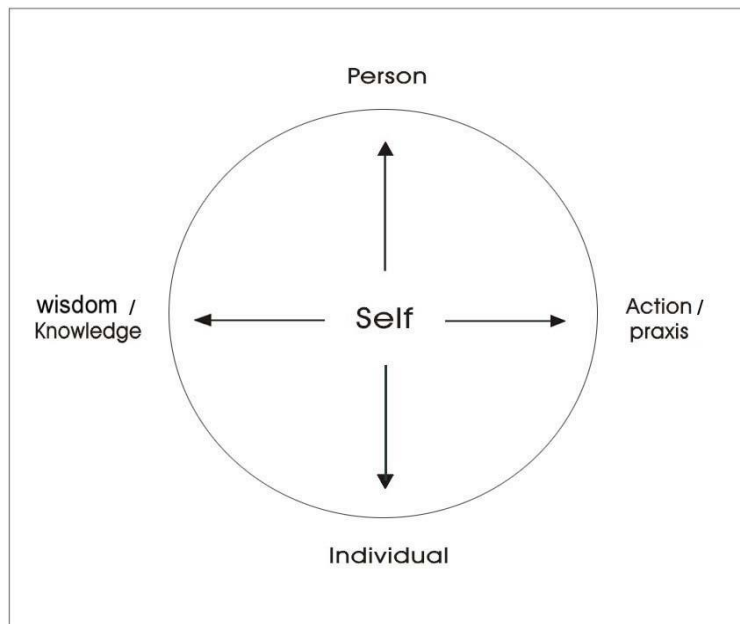


Figure 1. The prototype of self as a Mandala

In Figure 1, *self* in the circle is situated in the center of two bi-directional arrows: one end of the horizontal arrow points at *action* or *praxis*, another end points at *wisdom* or *knowledge*. The top of the vertical arrow points at *person*, and the bottom points at *individual*. All of the four concepts are located outside the circle but within the square. The arrangement of these five concepts means that one's self is being exerted by several forces from the lifeworld. But, all five concepts have special implications in cultural psychology which should be elaborated in more detail below.

One of the bi-directional horizontal arrows directs to *action* rather than *behavior* as frequently used by psychologists; it refers to one's action taken after reflection, rather than conceiving *self* as the black box mediating stimulus and response as viewed by behaviorists. The *praxis* under action means the *action* taken in accordance with a particular theoretical knowledge or a judgment made by a moral agent.

Individual, Person, and Self

The difference between *person*, *self*, and *individual* was raised by anthropologist Grace G. Harris (1989). She indicated that these three concepts have very different meanings in the Western academic tradition: *individual* is a biological concept, it regards human beings as a member of the human species who are of no difference to other creatures in the universe.

Person is a sociological or cultural concept. It views a person as an agent-in-society who takes a certain standpoint in social order and plans a series of actions to achieve a particular goal. Every culture has its own definitions of appropriate and permitted behaviors, which have been endowed with specific meanings and values, and are transmitted to an individual through various ways of socialization.

Self is a psychological concept. In the conceptual framework of Figure 1, *self* is the locus of experience, one who is able to take various actions in different social contexts, and one who is able to make self-reflections in attaining goals.

In response to my arguments that “my approach represents efforts to preserve cultural identity and subjectivity for any non-Western culture” and “my approach enables them to preserve their cultural identity and subjectivity” (Hwang 2014, 11), Allwood said:

In line with his tendency to reify and “centralize” cultural contents (i.e., to focus on shared contents), he now also reifies and centralizes cultural identity (i.e., one cultural identity). Thus, it seems that he believes that the cultural identity is more or less the same for all people in a society and that it is relatively stable and unchanging (and moreover, that it is a virtue that this remains the case). However, to think that each person in a society conceives of the identity of their culture in the same way and that this way

is not changing very much over time seems clearly unreasonable, so hopefully I have misunderstood this. (Allwood 2014a, 33)

Reification of Culture

Prof. Allwood appeared to have misunderstood my *Mandala model*, for he seemed to mix up the procedure of theoretical construction with that of empirical research. The *Mandala model* may be used to construct culture-inclusive theories on the ideal *Person* of Confucian *relational self*, Taoist *authentic self*, or Buddhist *non-self* (Hwang & Chang 2009). Based on such theoretical analysis, an IPist certainly may conduct empirical research to see how those culture concepts are “distributed in a society,” as insisted by Prof. Allwood (2013a, b; 2014a, b) repeatedly in our debates. Unfortunately, as an outside observer, it is understandably difficult for Prof. Allwood to have an empathetic understanding of my pioneer role in the indigenization movement of psychology:

Alternatively, he may believe that there is a cultural super-identity for each culture that exists irrespectively of the different conceptions of the identity of their culture held by the persons in a culture group. If so, then it would also seem that he does not take into account the social processes that continuously and dynamically compete to “negotiate” conceptions of the cultural identity of societies. In contrast Prof. Hwang’s reified and “centralized” conception of one fairly unchanging cultural identity it seems more realistic to recognize that there are many competing images of the identity of a specific culture. (Allwood 2014a, 33)

Prof. Allwood may still remember the title of my first article which triggered our debates: “Reification of culture in indigenous psychologies: Merit or Mistake?” (Hwang 2011). The construction of culture-inclusive theories is certainly out of a “reified” and “centralized” conception of one’s fairly unchanging cultural identity. But, it is the prior procedure for conducting empirical research. It does not imply that “there is a cultural super-identity for each culture that exists irrespectively of the different concepts of the identity of their culture held by the persons in a culture group.”

The Duality of Self

On the contrary, self as the subject of agency, in my *Mandala model* is endowed with two important capabilities: reflexivity and knowledgeability. Reflexivity means that the self is able to monitor his/her own action, and able to give reasons for the action. Knowledgeability means that the self is able to memorize, store, and organize various forms of knowledge, and make them a well-integrated system of knowledge.

From the perspective of psychology, an individual’s ability of reflexive awareness will result in the duality of self: Self as a subject who is able to integrate his/her own behaviors distinguishable from others, this is the basis of self-identity. Meanwhile, self

has the ability to reflect and therefore knows one's relationship with other objects in the world. Hence, one may regard oneself as part of a particular social group and acquire a sense of social identity.

An individual's self-identity and social-identity have very important implications for one's self-reflection. In Figure 1, the horizontal bi-directional arrow points at wisdom/knowledge and action/praxis, and the vertical one points at person and individual, respectively. This means that the self in one's lifeworld exists in a field of forces. When an individual intends to take action, his/her decision may be exerted by several forces, especially when one identifies with a particular social role. On the one hand, s/he has to think about how to act as a socialized person. On the other hand, s/he is pushed by various desires as a biological individual. When s/he takes action and encounters problems, s/he may reflect by using the information stored in his/her personal stock of knowledge. If the problem persists, s/he may take further steps to search for solutions from the social stock of knowledge.

Conclusion

With the aid of my *Mandala model*, we may go back to discuss some of Prof. Allwood's picky questions. Shweder et al. (1998) argued that, according to the principle of cultural psychology: "one mind, many mentalities", mind means the totality of actual and potential conceptual contents of human cognitive process, which is determined by biological factors (Shweder 2000, 210). Mentality denotes cognized and activated subset of mind which had been cultivated and owned by a particular individual or group so that it can serve as subjects of research by cultural psychologists.

It is a matter of course that my *Mandala model* fully "recognizes that there are many competing images of the identity in a specific culture." In other words, *Person* in the *Mandala model* may denote any image of identity in a specific culture. If Prof. Allwood likes, he may construct a culture-inclusive theory of *individual self* on the basis of his understanding of Western individualism (in fact, we already have a lot of theories of this kind in mainstream psychology), in addition to studying its distribution in any non-Western culture. However, without the construction of such culture-inclusive theories as models of Confucian relational self, Taoist authentic self, or Buddhist non-self, how can we know the potential images of the identity in Confucian culture? How can we conduct empirical research to study the distribution of those cultural understanding in Confucian society?

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