

In search of a new paradigm for cultural psychology

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It is my privilege to be invited to write a response to K.S. Yang's reply to my critique of the methodology he used in his empirical research on individual modernity in Taiwan (Hwang, 2003). Yang's reply consists of three parts: The first part provides a quick overview of the methodology used in his individual traditionality and modernity (T/M) research in Taiwan. The second part presents his reply to my methodological criticisms. The third part is a plea for more and better individual T/M research in Asia. My response consists of three corresponding sections, although I will concentrate on the second part of Yang's text.

Key words: individual T/M, inductive approach, modernity, theoretical construction, traditionalism.

Point of departure from Yang's methodology

Yang was my mentor when I was a graduate student in the Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University from 1969 to 1971. I completed my Masters thesis entitled 'Individual Modernity and Social Orientation' under Yang's supervision (Hwang & Yang, 1972) and have paid close attention to the progress in this field since then. In his reply to my critique, Yang (2003) said:

conceptually and empirically, I [K. S. Yang] deliberately tried to detach from the debates on sociological theories of societal modernity and adopted a purely psychological approach to the study of Chinese individual T/M as two sets of actually existing psychological and behavioral characteristics important to the daily functioning of Chinese people. (Yang, this issue, p. 264)

This is the point at which my approach departs from Yang's. I simply do not believe that a 'purely psychological approach' is possible when dealing with such context-dependent issues as Chinese individual T/M. On the contrary, it seems to me that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of culture-bound personality traits, such as individual traditionality or individual modernity, it is necessary for a researcher to first construct a theoretical model to explain how those personality traits are formed and how they function

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in a particular socio-cultural environment. To construct such a model, it is necessary for the researcher to carefully consider the debates on sociological theories of societal modernization, not to ignore them.

This strategy of theoretical construction should be adopted to study not only individual T/M, but also other psychological phenomena that are profoundly influenced by cultural factors. In fact, such psychological phenomena are exactly the objects of study in indigenous and cultural psychology. Individual T/M is simply an example.

Inductive approach versus theoretical construction

Given my emphasis on theoretical construction, which is a product of modern Western civilization, and my immersion in the indigenization movement of psychology since the 1980s, I assert that the most serious barrier for the future development of the indigenization movement is a lack of genuine understanding among indigenous psychologists about the progress of Western philosophy of science (Hwang, *in press a*). It seems to me that in order to continue the development of indigenous psychology, three levels of breakthrough should be made; namely, philosophical reflection, theoretical construction and empirical research (Hwang *in press b, c*).

Philosophical reflection is necessary to realize the implications of changes in the Western philosophy of science in the move from positivism to post-positivism. The epistemological goal of post-positivism is theoretical construction (Popper, 1934), as opposed to a compilation of empirical facts as advocated by positivists (Hwang, 2001). I also clearly presented the meaning of modernity, and set forth the limitations of inductive empiricism, the methodology of positivism, for progress in both individual T/M research and indigenous psychology.

In responding to my question 'What is the appropriate approach for conducting individual T/M research?' Yang (this issue, p. 268) made a distinction between individual and societal T/M:

Individual T comprises a set of concurrent traditional psychological characteristics or traits at the individual level, whereas individual M comprises a set of concurrent modern psychological characteristics or traits at the individual level. Societal T denotes a set of concurrent traditional economic, political, social and cultural characteristics at the society level, whereas societal M denotes a set of concurrent modern economic, political, social and cultural characteristics at the society level. (pp. 270–71)

Yang also argued that 'the various modalities of societal M have been separately and conceptually analyzed and empirically investigated as economic, political, social, and cultural modernity by sociologists, economists, political scientists, and cultural analysts' (p. 271).

One of the reasons for my critique of Yang's previous works is this very separation of T/M into individual and societal levels. This separation relegates the responsibility of conceptually analyzing the various modalities of societal T/M to other social scientists. In my opinion, to guide future research, in addition to adopting 'a psychometric approach from a dispositional perspective' in individual T/M research (Yang, this issue, p. 265), it is also essential to construct theoretical models that include careful consideration of the various modalities of societal modernity that have been conceptually analyzed and empirically investigated by other social scientists.

Moreover, it is important for psychologists to construct their theoretical models using a symbolic approach to explain how culture as a collection of symbols and concepts may enter the psyche and organize psychological phenomena. As I noted in my critique of Yang's previous works, two of the three approaches of cultural psychology identified by Ratner (1999) (the symbolic approach and activity theory, but not the individualistic approach) should be adopted in studying culturally bound or culturally influenced phenomena, such as individual T/M. It is not enough to study individual T/M and their implications for predicting activities in various domains of life with a 'psychometric approach from a dispositional perspective' (this issue, p. 265).

Li's (1988, 1992) Chinese worldview model of equilibrium and my analysis of Confucian tradition (Hwang, 1995, 2000, 2001) are examples of use of the symbolic approach.

Yang (this issue) said that:

To be honest, even if I re-did my research now, I would still not adopt a cultural psychological approach, simply because it is difficult for me to envision how such an approach can result in quantitative empirical data for simultaneously identifying a set of T or M dispositions in a broad and systematic way. (p. 271)

What are the major psychological traits of Chinese individual T and M? What are the quantitative relationships between the T and M traits? What are the antecedent, concurrent and subsequent correlates of the T and M traits? How are certain processes and mechanisms involved in the formation and change of each of the T and M traits? These are the types of question I wanted to answer. (Yang, this issue, p. 271)

Yang (this issue, p. 272) called these questions the 'what' type of questions and argued that 'the psychometric trait approach, which tends to focus on internal dispositions and to de-emphasize external, contextual factors, can do a better job' in answering this type of question. Yang also noted that there is another category of 'how'-type questions such as:

How are a specific traditional (or modern) cultural condition and its corresponding specific traditional (or modern) behavior 'yoked' to facilitate each other's formation, stability and change? How does a decrease and increase in the strength of a specific traditional (or modern) cultural condition affect its 'yoked' specific traditional (or modern) behavior? How does a cultural condition newly formed during the course of societal modernization create a new specific modern behavior? How do two conflicting traditional and modern cultural conditions affect their respective corresponding traditional and modern behaviors? (Yang, this issue, p. 272)

Yang argued that a cultural psychological approach is relatively more useful in answering the 'how' type of questions, while the psychometric dispositional approach addresses the 'what' type of questions (Yang, this issue, p. 272).

The question that arises at this point is: Given that individual T/M are personality traits formed in specific cultural contexts, how can social psychologists gain a comprehensive understanding of T/M by ignoring the 'how'-type questions and only addressing the 'what'-type questions only? Without answers to both questions, a sound theory is not possible, and without a sound theory, understanding of the psychological phenomena of individual T/M would always be partial and incomplete. Even critiquing the inductive and empirical approach is difficult because it would entail 'using a part to comment on the whole' and 'making post

hoc and ad hoc interpretations or evaluations' (Yang, this issue, pp. 277–8) because indigenous psychologists lack a sound theory describing what is *part* and what is whole. A theory is essential for making sound interpretations and evaluations.

In search of a new paradigm

The inductive and empirical approach adopted by Yang and others for studying individual T/M is very similar to the methodology used by psychologists for studying individualism and collectivism (IC). Recently, *Psychological Bulletin* (2002) published a special issue and invited several well-established psychologists to make criticisms on the methodology of IC research. In his critique of the measurement of the IC constructs, Fiske (2002, p. 84) argued that:

Perhaps the reason that IND [individualism] makes intuitive sense to Americans and some Western Europeans is that, although it is hodgepodge, it is our hodgepodge. IND is the concatenation of features that, in our own ideology and folk sociology, Americans perceive as defining our culture. COL [collectivism] is an abstraction that formalizes our 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.

If the words 'IND', 'Americans and some Western Europeans', 'Americans', 'COL' and 'the rest of the world' in this paragraph are replaced by 'traditionality', 'Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China', 'Chinese', 'modernity' and 'the modern world' respectively, the same arguments can be applied to criticize the measurement of individual T/M.

Kitayama (2002, p. 92) also questioned the assumptions behind the methodology of IC research, which assumes that attitudinal questions may be used to capture the core of a culture, and that the core elements of a culture are the set of values that are internalized and cognitively represented, otherwise they would not be measurable with a questionnaire. Kitayama called this view the 'entity view', as it describes culture as a static entity. Instead, Kitayama advocated a 'system view' of culture:

It is important to realize that culture is not just 'in the head'. Rather, culture is 'out there' in the form of external realities and collective patterns of behavior (Farr, 1991). Long emphasized by leading theorists of culture, such as Geertz (1973), Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963), and D'Andrade (2001), cultural meanings are typically externalized in a pattern of historically accumulated public artifacts and associated mental functions and behaviors (Adams *et al.*, 2001). These artifacts and collective behavioral patterns include verbal and non-verbal symbols (e.g. language and media), daily practices and routines (e.g. conversational scripts), tools (e.g. abacus and Internet), and social institutions and structures (e.g. merit pay *vs* seniority systems). Because a cultural meaning system is expressed in, and therefore carried and transmitted by, the collective patterns of behaviors and online mental processes and responses, it is often tacit for any given individual. (p. 92)

This quote illustrates exactly what I mean by a symbolic approach for cultural psychology. In other words, my critique of Yang's methodology of empirical research on individual T/M in Taiwan (this issue) should be understood from a broader perspective. It represents a methodological and epistemological reflection by the scientific community of psychology on the limitations of the inductive and the empirical approach, which have been

popular in the field of psychology in the past decades. It is expected that such a reflection might bring forth a new research paradigm for cultural psychology in the future.

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