
Title	Exploring the possibility to conduct indigenous and cross-indigenous psychology in Malaysia and Singapore
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EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY TO CONDUCT INDIGENOUS AND CROSS-INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

Various researchers' views of indigenous study are presented in the introduction. For instance, Sinha(1993) perceives indigenization as a way to transfer scientific and psychological knowledge from the West. Berry (1993) defines it as the scientific study of human behavior (or the mind) that is native. Indigenous study is defined as a subset of cross-cultural psychology. Research directions of indigenous studies, from universal to indigenous approach and vice versa, are discussed. Malaysia and Singapore are natural environments where indigenous and cross-indigenous studies can and should take place. An indigenous study in the Malaysian and Singaporean context refers to comparative studies of behaviors (and/or thinking patterns) of various ethnic groups within a national boundary. Cross-indigenous studies in the similar context include investigations across national boundary. An example of cross-indigenous studies as such is the investigation of behaviors (and/or thinking patterns) between the Chinese living in Singapore and those living in Australia or in other countries. A few areas for cross-indigenous research are suggested. There are multiculturalism and multilingualism, patterns of socialization, attitudes, cognitive styles and group phenomenon. Models of indigenous, cross-indigenous as well as cross-cultural studies are presented.

INDIGENOUS STUDY AS A SUBSET OF CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

One of the goals of cross-cultural psychology which has begun in the 1960s is to generate a universal psychology (see Triandis, 1980, pp. 3-5, Why cross-cultural psychology? Berry, et al. 1992, pp. 2-4, Goals of cross-cultural psychology). Accordingly, psychological theories and methods, primarily from Western Europe and the United States, are tested for their relevance in other cultural settings. Thereafter, the focus shifts to cross-cultural research within and across national boundaries.

For three decades, researchers in cross-cultural psychology have stressed the importance of including cultural aspects in psychological studies (see Segall et al., 1990, for a detailed discussion on human behavior and culture). The number of countries being sampled in one study increases (Ongel & Smith, 1994). Even though most of the cross-cultural researchers are affiliated with Western institutions (Tan, 1994), researchers from non-English speaking countries have been gradually gaining momentum to conduct psychological studies in their home environments (see Yang, 1991, for the indigenous studies in Taiwan; Enriquez, 1993, for Filipino psychology; Sinha, 1993, for Indian psychology; Ho, 1990, for Asian psychology). In this regard, research from indigenous perspectives is attracting special consideration. Indigenous research offers a new dimension for understanding psychological phenomena. It legitimizes the native researchers' attempts to explore psychological phenomena in their own natural environments. It also encourages the development of methods that suit these environments. Indigenous studies are indispensable because they encourage the discovery of new psychological variables in groups from developed or

underdeveloped Eastern and Western countries which have not been researched intensively.

Cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Sinha, 1989; Kagitcibasi, 1992; Berry, 1993; Kim, 1990), anthropologists (e.g. Bennagen, 1990), and psychologists of the Third World and Asian countries (e.g. Enriquez, 1990; Ho, 1990; Yang, 1991) are among the pioneers of indigenous studies. Since the 1980's cross-cultural research which helps to broaden the horizon of psychological studies has been "campaigning" for its goals through various studies such as those pertaining to immigrants and minorities (see Ekstrand, 1986; Berry and Annis, 1988, for the papers selected on ethnic psychology), and to the indigenous investigation itself. Working together with cross-cultural psychology, indigenous psychology constitutes a unified aspect of mainstream psychology (Sinha, 1989; Tan, 1994). In the indigenous psychologies approach individual, social, cultural, and temporal variations are incorporated into the research design rather than eliminated or controlled" (Kim & Berry, 1993, p. 7). This characteristic contrasts with the tendency of cross-cultural psychology to consider culture as an independent variable. Berry (1993) claims that indigenous psychology places more emphasis on national than on international research. It recognizes, however, the importance of comparative studies, because its ultimate goal, as that of cross-cultural psychology, is to develop a universal psychology (see Enriquez, 1990, for cross-indigenous methods).

INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS DIRECTION

There are various views on what indigenous psychology is. All indigenous psychologists agree that studies of behavior should be carried out within the appropriate cultural framework. Kim and Berry (1993) consider the importance of native (local) research designs. "Indigenous psychologies can be defined as the scientific study of human behavior (or the mind) that is native, that is not transplanted from other regions, and that is designed for its people" (p. 2). Though native researchers are given a higher priority, indigenous psychology also encourages the engagement of outsiders (not natives) (Kim & Berry, 1993). Sinha (1993) perceives indigenization as a way to transfer scientific and psychological knowledge from the West in such a way that it suits the social and cultural milieu of the recipient countries. In contrast to psychology as a scientific discipline, some researchers link indigenous psychologies to lay or naive psychology held by ordinary people of a given culture (Boski, 1993). For instance, Jodelet (1993) claims that "... lay or naive psychology must be treated as an 'indigenous' one, even in cultures where scientific information is widely diffused via scholarly or mass media channels" (p.178). Durojaiye (1993) argues that "indigenous psychology will ... be unraveled to the extent that psychological concepts are identified and labeled from the indigenous people's expression of their understanding of specific behavior within their traditional and cultural daily lives" (p. 219).

Cross-cultural psychologists have criticized general psychology as being culture blind (insufficient, explicit consideration of the cultural context) and culture-bound (problem of applicability of many of its theories and findings to other cultures) (Berry

& Kim, 1993). Berry and Kim (1993) agree that indigenous psychologies in themselves do not reduce the culture-bound nature of general psychology. However, cross-indigenous psychologies have an advantage over general psychology when a number of indigenous psychologies are considered as one comprehensive body of knowledge. "The eventual outcome can be termed a universal psychology and involves a shift in perspective from indigenous psychologies to a cross-indigenous psychology and an integration with cross-cultural psychology" (p. 278).

Two directions of research for achieving the universality of psychological theories and methods are discussed in this section. One direction supports the assumption that the existing psychological theories and methods are universal laws, which should be tested cross-culturally and cross-indigenously (see Figure 1). The other direction begins with the investigation from the indigenous perspectives (or views) and examines the findings on a cross-indigenous and/or cross-cultural basis. The common findings can then be used to develop a universal psychology (see Figure 2). Both directions of research can coexist. The first approach focuses on cross-cultural research, whereas the second emphasizes indigenous studies. It is believed that a combination of these research directions should bring forth a universal psychology.

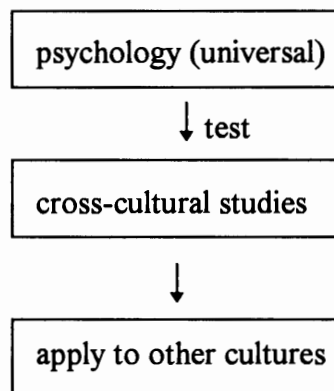


Figure 1: Testing universal psychology across cultures

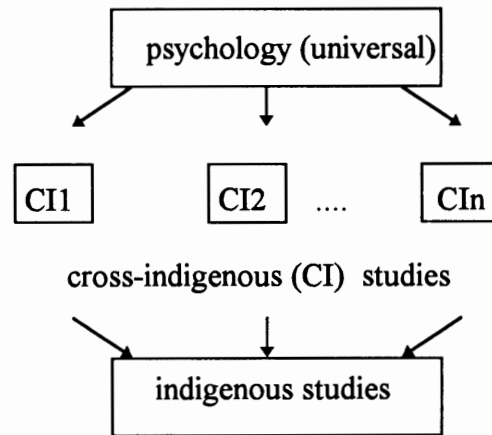


Figure 2: From indigenous to universal psychology

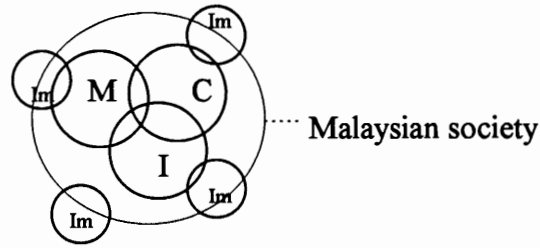
INDIGENOUS STUDIES IN THE MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN CONTEXT

During the colonial period in the early 1900s, many Chinese and Indian workers and businessmen immigrated to Malaysia and Singapore. The freedom to practice their own cultures, religions, and languages shape the multicultural and multilinguistic features of these societies. The Malays were earlier residents than the Chinese and the Indians in Malaysia. They are Muslims and comprise 55% of the population. The Chinese make up 34% of the population. They majority adhere to a belief system combining Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Christians are in the minority. Indians comprise 10% of the Peninsular Malaysian population and are primarily Hindus. Only a small percent are Buddhists or Christians. With the similar demographic development, Singapore consists of 76.4% Chinese, 14.9% Malays, 6.4% Indians, and 2.3% other (LePoer, 1991).

The national language of these countries is Malay. Even though English is the language of instruction in schools and universities in Singapore, the children are

encouraged to master their native languages or one of the languages of the existing ethnic groups. Three types of primary schools exist in Malaysia: Malay schools conducted in Malay or Malaysian, Chinese schools conducted in Mandarin, and Indian schools where Tamil prevails. These schools use the same curriculum. While Malaysian and English are both taught in Chinese and Tamil schools, English is the only foreign language in Malay schools. If there are enough Chinese and Indian students there who request Chinese and Tamil classes, these languages will also be taught in the Malay schools. At the secondary level and beyond, all schools conduct instruction in Malay. Students in Malaysia and Singapore can converse in at least two languages.

Indigenous psychology is the psychology of a region. A region according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1985), is "an administrative area, division, or district; or a broad homogenous geographical area" (Mish, p. 991). Examples of indigenous research of a large region are Filipino psychology (Enriquez, 1990), Asian psychology (Ho, 1990), Mexican psychology (Diaz-Guerrero, 1993), and Latin American psychology (Ardila, 1993). Examples of indigenous studies of a small region are investigations of various ethnic groups (the Chinese, the Malay, and the Indian) and of other recently immigrated workers to Malaysia or Singapore (see Figure 3). Separate studies are conducted at the beginning of the research in order to discover culture-specific and culture-universal features of these groups. Thereafter, cross-indigenous studies are carried out to explore common features between two groups (e.g. Chinese Malaysians and Malay Malaysians), or between three group (e.g. Chinese Malaysians, Malay Malaysians, and Indian Malaysians). Findings of indigenous psychologies across various cultural settings, i.e., cross-indigenous, are synthesized into a universal psychology.



C= Chinese, I= Indians, Im= new immigrants, M= Malays

Figure 3: An example of Indigenous Studies in Malaysia

Indigenous and cross-indigenous studies within national boundaries allow an empirical replication to take place easily. It also allows the natural control of variables (e.g. political and economic). Thus, differences between two groups can be traced back to language, religious or cultural factors. If the subjects come from the same socio-economic and educational background, then language and cultural practices can be considered as the main factors contributing to the differences. For instance, Baba Malaysians are Chinese Malaysians who speak Malay but who hold tightly to the Chinese traditions. Differences between this group and the Malays may be due to religious and traditional practices. Differences between the Babas and the Chinese, however, may be due to communicative modes of disparate daily linguistic practices.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

People who live next to each other, speak the same dialects, and engage in similar activities (e.g. similar occupations) are likely to share the same subjective culture (Triandis, 1972). With reference to this definition, the subjects of multicultural societies are examined as to whether they speak the same language or dialect, attend to

the same social activities or live in the same environment. In many states of Malaysia, for instance, there are regions occupied by only one ethnic group, for instance, the Chinese new villages or the Malay kampungs. Urbanization in the 1970s has changed the composition of the ethnic groups in the cities. This, however, does not mean that the contact between ethnic groups has intensified. The creation of new housing areas is an attempt to encourage various ethnic groups to live together. The use of a national language since the 1970s aims to reduce ethnic differences. But is language the only factor determining the harmonious coexistence of these groups? Other factors such as religious practices should also be considered. In a study concerning the perception of stress, differences between the Chinese and the Malays were found in relation to religious activities (Tan, 1991 & 1995).

Malaysian and Singapore societies have experienced rapid changes in economy as well as in technology in the past decades. Education has been significant in these societies because it facilitates social mobility. Family size decreases especially in the cities or big towns. Many young families live apart from their parents or extended family. As such parent-child relationship evolves. Structure of social support changes. Along with the modernization and the economic development the interpersonal relation that emphasizes collective efforts is likely to be replaced by the emphasis on the importance of individual goals. In these multicultural societies, patterns of communications and ways to dissolve conflicts between different ethnic groups or individuals of various backgrounds should be given attention. Singapore and Malaysia are two societies with a high power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Teachers as well as superiors have been symbols of authorities. Will this feature continue, when these societies are getting more individualistic? If there is a change of culture, from more

collectivist to more individualistic, will this affect the cognitive patterns of the individuals? To summarize the problem areas that are discussed, a number of research areas in Malaysia and Singapore are proposed in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed multicultural research areas in Malaysia and Singapore

Field	Examples of research areas
Culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language (e.g. bilingualism) 2. Biculturalism and/or multiculturalism 3. Living philosophy (e.g. religion)
Socialization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parent-child relationships 2. Relationships among peers 3. Kinship 4. Teacher-student relationships 5. Subordinate-superior relationships
Attitudes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Life styles 2. Type of social supports (e.g. kinship, authority, religious teacher) 3. Education 4. Family-concept 5. Self-concept versus social concept
Cognition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Types of intelligence/creativity/giftedness 2. Thinking patterns/styles
Group Phenomena	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership 2. Inter-ethnic conflicts/communication/activities

CROSS-INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Indigenous studies emphasize regional research and the use of native methods. Cross-indigenous studies stress inter-regional investigation and a global unity. Cross-indigenous studies within national boundaries, which deal, for instance, with a psychological phenomenon such as lay conceptions of technical creativity, can be

carried out with Malay Malaysians (or Singaporeans), Chinese Malaysians (or Singaporeans) and Indian Malaysians (or Singaporeans). Cross-indigenous studies on the same theme across national boundaries can be conducted between Malay (or Chinese or Indian) Malaysians and Malay (or Chinese or Indian) Singaporeans.

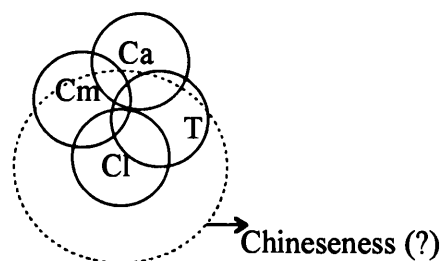
An example of cross-indigenous study across national boundaries is illustrated as follows. Two groups of people who have the same ethnic background, speak the same language but live in different countries are investigated with respect to their conceptions of specific psychological phenomena. Social and political situations of these countries induce different living habits. Chinese Malaysians and Chinese Singaporeans, for instance, were originally immigrants from South China (see Table 2). Because these groups come from a common, historical, ethnic background, we hypothesize that they should possess many similar cultural features. Cross-indigenous studies help to determine the extent to which these groups still reveal similarities after decades of political separation. Analogous comparisons can be carried out for Chinese living in Mainland China, in Taiwan, in Hong Kong and in other parts of the world.

Table 2: Chinese Ethnic Groups in Various Countries

	Chinese M'sian	Chinese S'porean	Hong Kong Chinese	Taiwanese	Mainland Chinese	Chinese in other countries
colonization	x	x	x	-	-	-
southern	x	x	x	x	?	?
immigrants	x	x	-	-	-	x
native	-	-	x	x	x	-

Chinese Malaysians, Chinese Singaporeans and Hong Kong Chinese, who represent three generations of people from South China, have experienced colonization under

British rule. Like the Taiwanese, who are also from South China, they speak a dialect. The main dialect of the Hong Kong Chinese is Cantonese, whereas that of the Taiwanese is Fujian. Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans speak either Cantonese (Kuangtong), Fujian, Hakka (Kejia) or Chaozhou. A campaign, beginning in the 1980s, encourages many Chinese to speak Mandarin, instead of their own dialects. Whereas Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Chinese are native to their countries, Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and other parts of the world are immigrants. Acculturation occurs for those who live in a new environment. A cross-indigenous study on the preservation of the "Chineseness" (a term used by Wang, 1991) (see Figure 4) or Chinese features of these groups gives rise to an understanding of the influence of different political, economical and social situations on the change of habits, life philosophy and living styles of an ethnic group. Similar studies can be conducted to find out the similar and different features of the Malays and the Indians living in various social and political systems. If all the findings of indigenous, cross-indigenous, and cross-cultural studies are integrated into a model or a theory, a universal psychology is developed. A specific model or theory, however, should also be designed, if culture-sensitive psychological phenomena exist in a particular culture.



Cm= Chinese Malaysian; Ca= Chinese in Australia; Cl= Mainland Chinese; T=Taiwanese

Figure 4: An example of discovering the Chineseness across cultures

SUMMARY

The existence of more than one ethnic group in a society is not a new phenomenon. The flow of immigrants to other countries and the advances of communication networks have increased the possibility of the development of pluralistic societies. Interindigenous studies of multicultural societies are essential in order to reach an understanding of these diversified ethnic groups and to develop appropriate methods for an effective investigation. A global understanding of mankind is an essential goal of the psychologists. Universal laws of psychology can only be realized, if psychologists from all regions contribute their efforts. Psychologists native to the particular regions may often be the best suited to explore the various psychological and cultural phenomena (though it must not always be true). Indigenous studies arouse the interest of the native researchers and encourage them to participate in regional studies. The results of such studies can help towards the development of a universal psychology. Indigenous, cross-indigenous and cross-cultural studies provide this kind of opportunity. It is essential to be actively involved in these kinds of research, because contemporary psychology is still in search of its universal identity.

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