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On the Road to Half a Century of Cross-Cultural Psychology: Foundations, Current Status, and Forecasts

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On the Road to Half a Century of Cross-Cultural Psychology: Foundations, Current Status, and Forecasts

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Prefatory Comments

The modern movement of cross-cultural psychology began in the mid-1960s. Shortly after those earlier activities, two conferences were building blocks in helping to develop and institutionalize the field. The first was a NATO-sponsored conference held in Istanbul in 1971. Organized by Lee J. Cronbach and Pieter J. D. Drenth, it resulted in a book that they edited, *Mental tests and cultural adaptation* (Mouton Press, 1972). The second was the inaugural IACCP conference held in Hong Kong in 1972. It was organized by John Dawson and resulted in the first IACCP proceedings volume, *Readings in cross-cultural psychology* (Dawson and Lonner, published by the University of Hong Kong Press in 1974). In addition, a number of other activities spanning the mid-1960s to the early 1970s were important in setting the stage for the rapid ascent of contemporary culture-oriented psychology. For example, the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* was inaugurated in 1970. Unit 1 of IACCP's *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* contains further information about the first half century of IACCP (IACCP.org).

An invited roundtable/symposium prepared for the 22nd international IACCP conference of IACCP, held in Reims, France featured the views of six persons who attended one or both of those conferences, and/or made numerous early contributions to cross-cultural psychology. All are still quite active in the field. The roundtable/symposium had three goals: 1) to give an overview of how the modern movement of cross-cultural psychology started nearly half a century ago, 2) to provide commentaries and opinions about its current status, and 3) to speculate, if appropriate, on future directions of the movement. The primary intended audience was and continues to be the current membership of IACCP, and especially the younger members who may not know much about the beginnings but who will nevertheless inherit the role of standard-bearers in efforts to chart the future course of cross-cultural psychology.

All six participants in the symposium/roundtable have been devoted to the psychological study of culture for at least 45 years; together they account for about 275 person-years of experience. Somewhere in their backgrounds and education the cross-cultural bug bit them and led to lengthy dedicated careers. Four of the six are past presidents of IACCP and one is the current president. All six have received various honors and awards.

Forty years ago, just five years after JCCP was inaugurated and three years after the first IACCP conference in Hong Kong, I wrote a chapter for a book that warrants being mentioned here (Lonner, 1975). One section of the chapter was headed "Three Eras in Cross-Cultural Psychology." I argued that the first era, which I called "the era

of the unfortunate protostereotype”, covered the first 30 years of the century – the 20th – which now seems to be a relic of the distant past. I noted that most culture-oriented studies then were done hastily and by a psychologist who found himself (sic) in an exotic culture where he used some tests or tasks to assess various attributes of “primitive” people and then made some sweeping generalizations about them. Of course, some very good, even seminal, work was done in that era, but that was a formative period and the inquisitive researcher didn’t have much methodological expertise to guide him or her. What I called the “workhorse model” characterized the second era, which roughly covered the next 30-year period (1930-1960). Culture-oriented research done then was primarily comparative, and that involved contrasting groups of individuals from two or more cultures. Testing for “universality” in some area, such as intelligence or personality or psychological attachment or Piagetian stages of cognitive development was common, as was the search for interesting differences, doing so within the tug-of-war between universalism and relativism. The phrase “let’s see how they do on our tricks” is perhaps a good way to describe a lot of conceptual and methodological rationale in that era.



Founders symposium. From left: Ype Poortinga, Robert Serpell, Patricia Greenfield, Walt Lonner, Cigdem Kagitcibasi, John Berry

Following that period, I opined, the third era had only recently emerged. In that era, which began in the early 1960s and quickly gained momentum, I noted that the better

studies either 1) employed “multi-methods” that were coordinated by multi-researchers in multi-cultures or 2) systematically and longitudinally studied human behavior by carefully selecting cultures and ecologies after appropriate and purposeful reasons for doing so were decided upon. I believe that the spirit of the third era is still with us. However, our collective feet are now firmly planted in the fourth era -- one that is characterized by having access to a vastly superior arsenal of methodological and statistical perspectives and techniques as well as mountains of culture-oriented research that now permeates the literature. The six psychologists who participated in the Reims symposium/roundtable were born in the second era but “came of age” in the third era. Each of their presentations reflect this, and so do the hundreds of students who learned from them. In any event, all of us who participated in the symposium/roundtable owe a debt of gratitude to many who contributed to the field in the different eras. Likewise, the new generation of culture-oriented psychologists will be wisely advised by those who traveled the road during the many decades, or eras, that have passed. Wisdom is cumulative.



Video clip from Walt Lonner's talk

The following presentations, in the order presented at the conference, contain reflections of the five seasoned scholars who agreed to participate. Included in these relatively brief articles are comments about their careers as well as their current thinking about the status of the field, lessons learned, and what advice they might want to give to the next generation of cross-cultural psychologists, most of whom were not even born when IACCP was formed. As well-known representatives of the first generation of modern culture-oriented psychologists, they share some thoughts on various aspects of contemporary cross-cultural psychology and what the future may portend. The papers they prepared for this on-line resource are presented below in alphabetical order. Below are synopses of the presenters, including the roles they have played in IACCP and their current affiliations.

Participants

John W. Berry. Department of Psychology (Emeritus) Queen's University, Canada and National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia. Attended both Istanbul, 1971 and Hong Kong, 1972. Former president and Honorary Fellow of IACCP. Organizer and President of the 2nd IACCP conference in Kingston, Ontario (1974)

Patricia M. Greenfield. Department of Psychology, University of California at Los

Angeles, USA. Attended Hong Kong, 1972. President-Elect of IACCP for 2014-16. Organizer of a regional IACCP conference at UCLA (2013) and in 2015 a regional IACCP conference in Chiapas, Mexico.

Cigdem Kagitcibasi. Department of Psychology, Koc University, Turkey. Attended Istanbul, 1971. Former President and Honorary Fellow of IACCP. Organizer and President of the 8th international IACCP conference in Istanbul (1986).

Walter J. Lonner (Convener and Chair). Department of Psychology (Emeritus) Western Washington University. Attended Hong Kong, 1972. Founding Editor of JCCP (1970), former President and Honorary Fellow of IACCP. Organizer and President of the 14th international IACCP conference in Bellingham, Washington (1998).

Ype H. Poortinga. Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychology, Tilburg University, Netherlands. Attended the 1971 Istanbul conference. Dr. Poortinga is a former president and Honorary Fellow of IACCP. President and Organizer of the 3rd international IACCP conference in Tilburg, The Netherlands (1976)

Robert N. Serpell. Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Zambia. Made numerous early contributions to the literature in cross-cultural psychology and frequently presented papers at culture-oriented conferences. Has had a career-long dedication to psychological research in Africa.

Reference

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