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## **THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL GOAL OF INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY: THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSTRUCTIVE REALISM**

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Since the emergence of indigenous psychology in the 1970s, many debates about its epistemological goal have taken place between its proponents and mainstream psychologists. In order to settle these debates, it is necessary to agree on a sound philosophical foundation for the future development of indigenous psychology. The philosophy of constructive realism advocated by the Vienna School in recent years may provide such a philosophical foundation. In this article, I first review the epistemological challenges faced by indigenous psychologists. I argue that these challenges and their solution should be understood in the context of the modernization of non-Western countries. Then I illustrate the main ideas of constructive realism. Finally, I explain how the philosophy of constructive realism can be used to meet the epistemological challenges encountered by indigenous psychologists.

### **The Emergence of Indigenous Psychology**

Since the end of the 1970s, a number of psychologists have begun to advocate an indigenous approach to psychology in non-Western countries such as Mexico (Diaz-Guerrero, 1977), Korea (Kwon, 1979), Japan (Azuma & Imada, 1994), the Philippines (Church, 1984; Enriquez, 1977; Lagmay, 1984), India (Sinha, 1986), and Taiwan (Yang, 1997). In the early 1990s, the Communist countries of Eastern Europe collapsed, the long-lasting Cold War between the East and West after World War II came to an end, and various forms of ethnic conflict broke out all over the world. The clash of civilizations became a major issue in the new age of globalization (Huntington, 1996). Parallel to these developments, an indigenous psychology movement has spread to many areas of the world and attracted increasing attention from mainstream psychologists (Shirae & Levy, 2001).

Generally speaking, the emergence of indigenous psychology in non-Western countries has been inspired by a spirit of nationalism and anti-colonialism. Most psychologists in non-Western countries adopt conceptual frameworks and research methods developed by Western psychologists when conducting research in their native societies (Kao & Sinha, 1997; Mehryar, 1984; Sinha, 1986). Their research findings may be irrelevant to the psychology of the local people, and thus are unable to solve problems faced in people's daily lives. The problem of implantation may be most serious in the case of social psychology. Most knowledge in this field has been developed in the United States. American psychologists usually focus on issues relevant to their home society both as research topics and as the framework for theoretical construction (Moscovici, 1972). Four levels of ethnocentric bias are therefore likely in Western psychological research (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002):

1. Selection of items and stimuli in an instrument.
2. Choice of instruments and procedures.
3. Definition of theoretical concepts.
4. Choice of topic for research.

As a consequence, findings derived from replicating Western research paradigms might be irrelevant to or inadequate for understanding the mentality of people in non-Western countries (Sinha, 1986, 1988). The imposition of a Western research paradigm on non-Western countries can be viewed as a kind of cultural imperialism or colonialism (Ho, 1998). By ignoring the fact that many Western theories of social psychology are culturally bound, duplication of a Western paradigm in non-Western countries may result in neglect of cultural factors that may influence the development and manifestation of human behavior.

Based on such reasoning, many indigenous psychologists advocate "a bottom-up model building paradigm" (Kim, 2000, p. 265); promote "the study of human behavior and mental processes within a cultural context that relies on values, concepts, belief systems, methodologies, and other resources" (Ho, 1998, p. 94); and treat people "as interactive and proactive agents of their own actions" that occur in a meaningful context (Kim, Park & Park, 2000, p. 71). They perform "the scientific study of human behavior (or the mind) that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its peoples" (Kim & Berry, 1993, p. 2) in order to

develop a "cultural-appropriate psychology" (Azuma, 1984, p.53); "a psychology based on and responsive to indigenous culture and indigenous realities" (Enriquez, 1993, p.158); or a psychology whose "concepts, problems, hypothesis, methods, and test emanate from, adequately represent, and reflect upon the cultural context in which the behavior is observed" (Adair, Puhon & Vohra, 1993, p.149).

### **Challenges to Indigenous Psychology**

The approach of indigenous psychology just described has been criticized by mainstream psychologists. For example, Triandis (2000) pointed out that anthropologists have used a similar approach for years, and that accumulating anthropological data with an idiosyncratic approach may not have much significance in terms of contribution to the development of scientific psychology.

Poortinga (1999) indicated that an internal contradiction for development of indigenous psychology is implied in the usage of plural "indigenous psychologies" by many indigenous psychologists. The development of multiple psychologies not only contradicts the scientific requirement of parsimony, but also makes the demarcation of cultural populations an unresolved problem. If every culture has to develop its own psychology, how many indigenous psychologies should there be? How many psychologies would have to be developed for Africa? What is the optimal number of indigenous psychologies? What is the meaning of an indigenous psychology developed in a specific culture to people in other cultures?

David Ho is a supporter of indigenous psychology and has advocated for the development of an Asian psychology (1988) with warnings that blindly transporting the research paradigms of Western psychology into non-Western countries may lead to the trap of Western ethnocentrism. However, he has also pointed out that if every culture develops its own psychology, another kind of ethnocentrism in reverse would arise. Poortinga (1996) made similar criticism on this point. He argued that over-emphasis on the nature and extent of differences in psychological functioning between people of different cultures may make indigenous psychology a kind of "scientific ethnocentrism in a new guise."

Hermans and Kempen (1998) proposed the concept of "moving culture," which is changing continually over time, and discussed the perilous

problems of cultural dichotomies in a globalizing society. When intercultural communications become so frequent that the whole world is a global village, can culture be regarded as internally homogenous and externally distinctive? If individuals are able to choose and decide their own behavior, culture may have no necessary influence on the individual; psychological traits and mechanisms would be incidental. The notion of regarding culture as a psychological system becomes less feasible. Instead of regarding culture as a stable system geographically located in a particular area, it would be more viable to define cross-cultural differences in terms of specific ecocultural and sociocultural conditions (Poortinga, 1999).

Poortinga (1999, p. 425) strongly suggested that "differences in behavioral repertoires across cultural populations should be understood against the background of a broader frame of commonness." He argued that overemphasis on cross-cultural differences in behaviors and negation of important invariance in psychological functioning across different cultures is not only "factually incorrect," but also "theoretically misleading" (Poortinga, 1999, p. 419).

### **Philosophical Foundation of Indigenous Psychology**

In order to meet the challenge of multiple indigenous psychologies, many indigenous psychologists have argued that the final goal of indigenous psychology is to develop an Asian psychology (Ho, 1998), a global psychology (Enriquez, 1993; K. S. Yang, 1993, 2000), a human psychology (K. S. Yang, 1993), or a universal psychology (Berry & Kim, 1993). A careful examination of the controversial debates between indigenous psychologists and mainstream psychologists reveals that both camps concentrate their arguments on the issue of the epistemological goal for the development of indigenous psychology. A persuasive discourse to settle all related debates could not be provided if arguments are restricted only to the epistemological level.

In my article "Constructive Realism and Confucian Relationalism: An Epistemological Strategy for Developing Indigenous Psychology" I argued that there are three levels of breakthroughs to be made for the development of an indigenous psychology, namely, philosophical reflection, theoretical construction, and empirical research. On the level of philosophical reflection, indigenous psychologists should propose a philosophy that is able to

explain the essential difference between knowledge constructed by scientists after the 14<sup>th</sup> Century European Renaissance and that which was developed by people of non-European cultures during the course of their long histories. The goal of this philosophical reflection should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of modernization?
2. What is the meaning of modernization to non-Western societies?
3. Why has the movement of indigenous psychology emerged in many non-Western countries when the scientific communities of the world are dominated by Western psychology?
4. What kind of knowledge ought non-Western psychologists to pursue as scientists?

In other words, the emergence of the indigenous psychology movement can be conceptualized as a reaction by non-Western scholars against the blind imposition of Western paradigms on research conducted in indigenous societies. It is inspired by a spirit of nationalism or anti-colonialism. In order to settle debates about the epistemological goals of indigenous psychology, it is necessary to explain its occurrence in a broader context that illuminates the modernization of non-Western societies.

It seems to me that Western modernization has been characterized and supported by a special kind of knowledge constructed on the basis of philosophy of science. Two years ago, I published a book titled *The Logic of Social Science* that systematically presented major contributions of 17 major Western philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the progress of philosophy of science with respect to their viewpoints on ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Hwang, 2001). The book contains five parts: (a) positivism, (b) post-positivism, (c) structuralism, (d) hermeneutics, and (e) critical theory. The last chapter concludes with the philosophy of constructive realism. The theme of the first two parts of the book, positivism and post-positivism, is the philosophy of science mainly applied to natural science. Because psychology has traditionally been defined as a branch of science by Western psychologists, this philosophy of science is also used by many psychologists. The last three parts of the book, dealing with structuralism, hermeneutics and critical theory, contain paradigms frequently used by social scientists. Constructive realism is discussed in the last chapter as a philosophy of science and is proposed with an attempt to integrate its

previous development by Dr. Fritz Wallner, who organized the Vienna School, (not to be confused with the Vienna Circle, which was active in the world scientific community in 1930s) (Wallner, 1994; Slunecko, 1997).

Constructive realism classifies reality into three categories: reality itself (*wirklichkeit*), lifeworld, and microworld. *Reality itself* is something that cannot be understood by human beings. Human beings can understand only the worlds they have constructed with language, which include the *lifeworlds* constructed by cultural groups in their long development, and the *scientific microworlds* constructed by individual scientists.

### Two Types of Knowledge in the Scientific Microworld and the Lifeworld

The separation of the knowable world into lifeworld and scientific microworld is very helpful for coping with the challenges encountered by indigenous psychologists, although Wallner's description of these two worlds is not clear enough to answer the aforementioned questions with regard to indigenous psychology. For this reason, I have reviewed previous discourses on the difference between the types of knowledge constructed in the lifeworld and the microworld (Hwang, 2000), and compared them on five concerns, namely, the constructor, ways of thinking, types of rationality, patterns of construction, and functions of worldview (see Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Two Types of Knowledge in Lifeworld and Scientific Microworld*

	<b>Lifeworld</b>	<b>Scientific Microworld</b>
Constructor	Cultural group	Single scientist
Ways of thinking	Originative thinking	Technique thinking
Types of rationality	Substantive rationality	Formal rationality
Patterns of construction	Participative constructive	Dominative construction
Functions of worldview	Meaning of life	Recognition of world

The microworld of scientific knowledge is constructed by a single scientist, while the language and knowledge used by people in their lifeworlds is constructed by a group of people living with the same cultural background for a long period of time. In the originating years of a particular culture, people concentrate themselves on observing the external world and contemplating the nature of every object in the lifeworld. They try their best to make every thing manifest itself in the language they create to represent it. Heidegger labeled this way of thinking *originative thinking* or *essential thinking* (1966). In contrast, the language used by scientists to construct microworlds of scientific knowledge is intentionally created to reach a specific goal. The language has a compulsory and aggressive character that demands the most gain with the least cost, and is a product of *technical thinking* or *metaphysical thinking* from Heidegger's perspective.

From the perspectives of insiders living in a given society, collective consciousness and social representations are all rational (Durkheim, 1912/1965). But there is a fundamental difference between the rationality used for constructing a scientific microworld and that used in a lifeworld. In their lifeworlds, people emphasize the importance of *substantive rationality*, which refers to the value of ends or results judged from a particular position. It is completely different from the *formal rationality* for constructing scientific microworlds used by Western scientists after the European Renaissance. Formal rationality emphasizes the importance of goals or results and provides no clear-cut means and procedures for reaching them. Only a few persons who are familiar with the special means and procedures can use them to pursue worthy goals. Substantive rationality pays attention only to value-neutral facts and the calculability of means and procedures that can be used by everyone to pursue their personal goals (Brubaker, 1984).

Scientists construct their microworlds using Cartesian dualism through *dominative construction* (Shen, 1994). They construct these scientific microworlds about various aspects of their external world that concern human beings in order to attain the goal of controlling and utilizing nature. These scientific microworlds are neither permanent nor absolutely certain; each has its own specific goal. When the goal loses importance, or when people are faced with new problems, scientists must construct new microworlds to address these problems. In contrast, people constructed knowledge in their lifeworlds by *participative construction*, especially in

pre-modern civilizations. Anthropologist Levy-Bruhl (1910/1966) indicated that the cultural systems of primitive people are constituted on the law of mystical participation, which conceptualizes human beings and nature as parts of an inseparable entity that can be viewed as a consciousness of cosmic holism (Taylor, 1871/1929).

The worldviews of the lifeworld and the scientific microworld are essentially different. As people of a given culture contemplate the nature of the universe and the situation of humankind, they gradually formulate their worldviews with original thinking in the course of their history. Walsh and Middleton (1984) indicated that a worldview thus formulated usually answers four broad categories of questions: Who am I? What is my situation of life? Why do I suffer? How do I find salvation? Generally speaking, a worldview describes not only human nature but also the relationship between an individual and the external environment, as well as the individual's historical situation in the world. In addition, it provides a diagnosis for problems and prescribes a recipe for their solution.

The worldview in a scientific microworld does not serve such a function. In his lexicon theory, Kuhn (1987) indicated that the scientific lexicon is composed of a set of terms with structure and content. Scientists use terms in the lexicon to make propositions in theory for describing the nature of the world. Theory and lexicon are inseparable. The microworld of a theory cannot be understood without its specific lexicon. Different theories are understood with their various lexicons. When a theory is changed, its lexicon will change with it. Each lexicon contains a method to recognize the world. Members of the same scientific community must master the same lexicon, understand the meanings of each term, and share the same worldview in order to communicate with one another. In order to think about the same problem and engage in related research in the same scientific community, they must share the same worldview. However, the worldview of a scientific microworld provides no answers to problems related to the meaning of life. It is essentially different from the worldview of a lifeworld.

The contrast between the two types of knowledge in a scientific microworld and a lifeworld provides answers to the questions mentioned in Section III. In the following sections, I propose my answers to those questions. The first issue I discuss is the meaning of modernization.

## Modernization and Social Change

In Western countries, scientific microworlds are mainly those that evolved from the interior of the civilization and were utilized for various types of production after the European Renaissance in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The implications of social change in the process of modernization can be elaborated in terms of the theory of communicative action proposed by Habermas (1978). According to Habermas, an individual's lifeworld is composed of three aspects, namely, culture, society and individual. For the aspect of culture, people sharing a certain cultural heritage may share the power of re-interpreting it, and determine the way of interpreting it through intersubjective communicative actions. For the aspect of society, communication may help people to establish standards of behavior, reinforce their identification with the community, and strengthen the integration of society. For the aspect of the individual, growth resulting from constant communication and learning may enable an individual to improve capacity for action and help to shape the integrity of personality.

Social systems in modern societies have evolved from people's lifeworlds through the process of rationalization. However, such newly differentiated social systems as university, industrial factory, or commercial organization are not only different from people's lifeworlds, but also antagonistic to each other. The three functions of communication in an individual's lifeworld are mutual understanding, coordination of action, and socialization. These functions of communication may satisfy three kinds of individual social needs, namely cultural reproduction, social integration, and individual socialization. However, the major goal for sustaining most social systems in modern society is material reproduction, and the criterion for evaluating system evolution is the enhancement of social control. In order to achieve this goal, each system must try to search for or develop the most efficient microworld for material reproduction. People working in the system have to use technical thinking to solve the problems they encounter in their production work. In order to attain this goal, money and power replace the position of language in the lifeworld and become the major media for system integration. Seeking consensus through communication and coordination may also take into consideration the one-dimensional thinking of reward and punishment. Systems in the lifeworld are liberated from the regulation of social norms, and be-

come more and more autonomous. Finally, the imperatives of social system begin to instrumentalize the lifeworld. Habermas (1978) called this process *colonization of the lifeworld by the social system*.

### Modernization of Non-Western Societies

Modernization of non-Western countries is fundamentally different from that of Western countries. The modernization process of Western countries has been facilitated by various factors and evolved mainly from their cultural traditions, while the modernization of non-Western countries is induced by factors external to the culture. In the process of modernization for non-Western countries, people also have to differentiate various social systems from their lifeworlds, such as schools, factories, research institutes, and use various microworlds of scientific knowledge to engage in different types of production work. However, because this kind of knowledge is transplanted from a foreign culture, when terms in those lexicons are translated into the local language, they are obviously distinct from the native language used by the local people in their daily lives. It is not difficult for local people to tell the difference between foreign language and their own culture.

Because microworlds of scientific knowledge have the character of instrumental rationality, people usually learn it in school, and only professionals can use them systematically to do production work in various social systems. It is a matter of course that this kind of knowledge may penetrate into the lifeworlds of ordinary people through various channels of communication. However, for most non-professionals, though they may learn scientific knowledge fragmentally and use it in daily life, it remains at the level of common sense. It is very hard for ordinary people to utilize such knowledge systematically and engage in production work as a professional does.

Also, because scientific knowledge has the character of instrumental rationality, it is different from substantial rationality in nature. It can neither be used as a guide for an individual's value orientation, nor to answer problems about the meaning of life. In many circumstances, it cannot replace knowledge learned from cultural traditions, such as values, view of life, philosophy of life, ethics, or morality. People in non-Western societies certainly use the various microworlds of scientific knowledge that

they learned in school to engage in production work in the social system. But, they may also utilize the knowledge inherited from their cultural tradition to deal with problems in their lifeworlds. Thus, they may have different types of knowledge in their cognitive system, some originated from Western culture, and some inherited from their own cultural tradition. People retrieve the most appropriate knowledge from their cognitive system to solve a particular problem faced in a given life situation. Of course, it is quite possible that even the individuals themselves would not be able to identify where the knowledge originated from in most situations.

This combination of types of knowledge is the most important reason for psychologists of non-Western countries to develop indigenous psychology. So far as this point is concerned, the concept of *domain-specific cultural theories* proposed by Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Veronica (2000) is of particular importance. In other words, cultural theories originated from various cultural traditions are applicable in specific domains only (Yang, 1988). In a particular domain of life, one may utilize microworlds of scientific knowledge to engage in production work, while in other domains, one may instead use knowledge originating from one's own cultural tradition to solve the problem. One of the missions for non-Western psychologists in developing indigenous psychology is to clarify what the most appropriate cultural theory is that can be used in a specific situation by people of a given cultural group.

### **The Epistemological Goal of Indigenous Psychology**

If this philosophical reflection is acceptable, the philosophy of constructive realism provides an answer to previous debates about the epistemological goal of indigenous psychology. In all cultures one of the most thoroughly investigated subjects is human beings themselves. During the process of cultural development, each cultural group develops various cultural theories of "psychology" to deal with the problems that their members may come across in their daily lives. Therefore, indigenous psychologists call for studying the psychological processes of local people as mediated by their native language in their lifeworlds. Mainstream psychologists do not oppose this claim, but they emphasize the importance of constructing microworlds of psychological knowledge and argue that "dif-

ferences in behavioral repertoires across cultural populations should be understood against the background of a broader frame of commonness" (Poortinga, 1999, p. 425).

From the perspective of constructive realism, a solution for indigenous psychologists to resolve the debate is to construct formal theories (or microworlds) about the psychological functioning of the human mind that are supposed to be universal, and then use these theories to analyze the particular mentality of a people in their lifeworlds with moving culture.

In order to attain this goal, indigenous psychologists in non-Western countries must admit that the philosophy of science containing the rules of the game for constructing microworlds of scientific knowledge is mainly a product of Western civilization. If they want to construct such microworlds, they have to transform their attitudes from anti-colonialism to post-colonialism, make themselves familiar with the Western philosophy of science, and utilize the most appropriate paradigm to solve the various academic problems they may encounter in attaining the epistemological goal of indigenous psychology.

### Conclusion

Based on this framework, I have developed a series of theoretical models of Confucian relationalism over the past twenty years. First, I constructed a formal model of Face and Favor on the basis of scientific realism (Hwang, 1987), and then used this model as a framework to analyze the deeper structure of Confucianism (Hwang, 1995, 2001). Even colleagues who support the indigenous approach often ask me whether the cultural tradition of Confucianism still exists under the impact of Western culture, and whether it is necessary to study Confucianism as a cultural system from the perspective of psychology. It is not difficult to see that such inquiries are proposed on the concept of moving culture. In responding to these kinds of questions, I emphasize that theoretical models about the deep structure of Confucianism are just microworlds constructed by a social scientist. They are cultural structures, but not psychological structures. Viewed from the perspective of structuralism, they are an unconscious model universal to all people in Confucian culture, but not a conscious model particular to any individual (Levi-Strauss, 1976). In people's actual lives, it is very hard to find any person who has the exact mentality as

described by the deep structure of a culture. However, such a structure can be used as a "broader frame of commonness" (Poortinga, 1999, p. 425) to study not only the social behaviors of people from Confucian societies, but also across various cultural populations.

To be more specific, under the influence of Confucianism, people of East Asian societies have developed various language games for human practice or activity shared by their cultural group, such as *cheong* in Korean (Choi, Kim & Kim, 1999; Choi & Choi, 2001), *amae* in Japanese (Doi, 1973; Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2001) or *renqing* in Chinese (Hwang, 1987). These language games represent Confucian forms of life, which can be regarded as the surface structure derived from the deep structure of Confucianism, or as cultural theories to be used in some specific domains of life by East Asian people. People in contemporary East Asian societies may or may not use these cultural theories in their lifeworlds. However, comprehension of this deep structure enables study of the unique feature of the Confucian mentality against the background of the universal structures of the human mind. By using this framework, empirical research may be conducted for the future development of indigenous psychology.

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