An Intersubjective Approach to Measuring Cultural Values and Beliefs

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Subtitle:

May the culture of cultural psychology be a complex culture!
Once upon a time in Hong Kong, several social psychologists met for a whole day to discuss culture and social psychology, among them are 4 complex thinkers and 1 simple thinker.
Lay theories

- People possess lay beliefs about other people, the world, and what people in their culture are like.
- These lay theories are seldom articulated explicitly, but people use them as premises for judgments and actions.
- Lay theories may mediate many cultural differences in judgments and behaviors.
Two types of lay theories

- Lay theories of the world and people
  - Event representations, a kind of declarative knowledge

- Lay theories of culture: Lay beliefs about how people of a particular culture are like
  - Person representations, also a kind of declarative knowledge
Lay theories of people and the world
In Bob’s own words …

A prototypic event representation can function as an “implicit theory” about the events that occur in a particular type of situation. As such, it can be used as a basis for both explanation and prediction …

Cultural differences in the nature of these representations are worth reconsidering in this context. Chiu et al. (1997) found that Asians are substantially more likely to have entity theories of the world than to have entity theories of individual persons, and are more inclined to have entity theories of the world than American participants are. This suggests that Asians may be less inclined than Americans to assign global traits to people that generalize over situations, but relatively more inclined to make situation-specific characterizations of individuals.
More generally, this analysis suggests the possibility that cultural differences in person representations are by-products of more fundamental differences in the content and implications of event representations (i.e., implicit theories) that individuals with different cultural backgrounds typically use to interpret their experiences.
A simplified version

- **Individual Agency (Disjoint agency)**
  - The world can change, but the person cannot.
    - The world accommodates the person.
      - An important component of individualism

- **Group Agency (Conjoint agency)**
  - The world cannot change, but people can.
    - The person accommodates the world
      - An important component of collectivism.
Study 1: Lay theories of people and the world

- The world is fixed: Some societal trends may dominate for a while, but the fundamental nature of our world is something that cannot be changed much.

- The person is fixed: A person’s moral character is something basic about them and they can’t change it.

- Fitting in vs. Resisting Influence:
  - I would try to change my personality if that helps me to improve my relationships with my friends.
  - I find it objectionable when others try to change my personality.
Chen, Chan, & Chiu, 04

Perceived fixedness (-5 to 5)

- European American
- Chinese Southerner (born after 1979)
- Hong Kong Chinese

Person Fixed
World Fixed
People who believe the world is more fixed than the person are more willing to change their personality to fit in ($r = .29, p < .001$).
**Group Agency Attribution:** To what extent do you think the leftmost fish’s movements seem influenced by other fish?

**Individual Agency Attribution:** To what extent do you think the leftmost fish’s movements seem influenced by internal cause?
Individual attribution

Group attribution
| Individuals’ lay theories of people and the world | Set up different agency models. Cultural differences may arise when there are different distributions of these lay theories in different cultural groups |
| Individuals’ lay theories of culture | Guide communicative actions with members of a certain culture |
| Shared lay theories of culture | Intersubjective representations of culture; may be used as materials for constructing the cultural self and cultural identities |
Questions

- Small cultural differences in lay theories (small effect size)
  - Likert scale measures are not valid?
- Mediation: Did explicit measures of lay theories mediate cultural differences in individual vs. group agency attributions?
  - No!
People have lay theories about what people in a culture are like, although these theories may not be entirely accurate.
Study 2: Agency Models and Causal Attribution

in collaboration with Venus S-l. Lee, Kevin K-p. Tam, Ivy Y-m. Lau

Participants

- 78 Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates
- 51 US European American undergraduates
Measures

Individual Agency

- In my society, individuals take control of the situation around them and exercise free will.
- The rules and laws in my society say that individuals should take control of the situation around them and exercise free will.
- Individuals set a course for themselves independent of the influences surrounding them.

Group Agency

- In my society, organizations take control of the situation around them and exercise free will.
- The rules and laws in my society say that organizations should take control of the situation around them and exercise free will.
- Organizations set a course for themselves independent of the influences surrounding them.
Design

Rating Conditions:

- How much do you agree with each of the following sentences? Please circle an appropriate number to indicate your answer.

- In your opinion, how much would Caucasian American in general agree with each of the following sentences? Please circle an appropriate number to indicate your answer.

- In your opinion, how much would Hong Kong Chinese in general agree with each of the following sentences? Please circle an appropriate number to indicate your answer.
Results

HK: Self-Rating  US: Self-Rating
HK estimated HK  HK estimated US
US estimated HK  US estimated US

individual Agency  - Group Agency
Small cultural differences in self-ratings of individual and group agency beliefs

High consensus on cultural differences

Do lay theories of culture create noise in the data? Or are they of substantial importance for understanding culture?
Hong Kong Chinese have more exposure to American culture than Americans have to Hong Kong culture.

- In 2002, there were 749,000 Hong Kong Chinese arrivals to the US (US Department of Commerce), and 1,000,844 US arrivals to Hong Kong (Hong Kong Tourist Board).
- There are 27 US TV channels available in HK, and only 3 Chinese TV channels in the US.
- Btw 1997 and 2003, there were 7-13 US movies each year on Hong Kong’s list of the 20 most popular movies. In contrast, only 1 Hong Kong movie in this period had made it to the list of the most popular 20 movies in the US: Crouching tiger and hidden dragon (2002)!
- Personal experience: Coverage of US news is better in Hong Kong media than in the US media.
Results

Individual Agency Scale

![Bar chart showing correlation between self-ratings and ratings by Hong Kong and US participants.](chart.png)
Results

Group Agency Scale

Self-Rating vs HK Rating
Self-Rating vs. US Rating
HK Rating vs. US Rating

Correlation

Hong Kong Participants
US Participants
Correlations between self-ratings and lay theories of culture are all positive, and consistent with participants’ cultural experiences, suggesting that lay theories of culture are just reference points for self-assessment. Instead, they may be important for understanding cultural experiences.
**Group Agency Attribution:** To what extent do you think the leftmost fish’s movements seem influenced by other fish?

**Individual Agency Attribution:** To what extent do you think the leftmost fish’s movements seem influenced by internal cause?
Results

- Individual Attribution
- Group Attribution

United States vs Hong Kong
Results: Predicting Group Attribution

-0.5  -0.4  -0.3  -0.2  -0.1  0   0.1  0.2  0.3  0.4

Hong Kong Participants

US Participants

-0.5  -0.4  -0.3  -0.2  -0.1  0   0.1  0.2  0.3  0.4

Standardized beta

Individual Agency: Self
Individual Agency: HK
Individual Agency: US
Group Agency: Self
Group Agency: HK
Group Agency: US
Findings from Other Studies

- Representations of what a prototypic member of a culture knows predict how individuals formulate a referential communication message for people in that culture (Venus Lee).
- Representations of the regulatory focus of a prototypic member of a culture predict the type of persuasive message that will be formulated for people in that culture (Angela Leung).
- Completing a survey is also a kind of communicative action (Oyserman & Schwarz).
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Shared Lay Theories

- When most people in the culture believe in the same lay theory, this theory becomes a part of the intersubjective reality in the culture.
- Qualities that are widely believed to be characteristic of a target culture may be seen as “essences” of the culture, and used as materials for constructing the cultural self and cultural identity.
Summary of Basic Findings

- People identify with a culture only when they endorse values that are widely perceived to be important for the culture (Catherine Wan).
- People identify more with culture A than culture B when they endorse values that are widely perceived to be more important to culture A than to culture B (Catherine Wan).
- Similar phenomena are found in gender identification and gender differentiation (Catherine Wan).
- Self-enhancement occurs only for traits that are widely perceived to be important to the culture (Kevin Tam).
Study 3: Study of Values

Individualist values
- Autonomy
- Competition
- Financial independence
- Individual effort
- Individual interests
- Individual responsibility
- Individuality
- Rights to privacy
- Self-reliance

Collectivist values
- Collective effort
- Collective responsibility
- Conformity
- Cooperation
- Group spirit
- Majority rule
- Mutual support from peers
- Self-sacrifice
- Striving for common good
Participants

66 European American university students (37 male and 29 female) from a public university in Midwestern United States, and 65 Chinese university students (23 male and 42 female) from a public university in Hong Kong, China.
Self-endorsement

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Hong Kong

US
There are some meaningful but not impressive cross-cultural differences in individualism vs. collectivism.
Americans’ Estimations

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There are some meaningful but not impressive cross-cultural differences in individualism vs. collectivism.

Americans believe that Americans are individualistic and Hong Kong Chinese are collectivistic, relatively speaking.
Hong Kong Chinese’s Estimations

Individualist values
- Autonomy
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Hong Kong

US
There are some meaningful but not impressive cross-cultural differences in individualism vs. collectivism.

Americans believe that Americans are individualistic and Hong Kong Chinese are collectivistic, relatively speaking.

Hong Kong Chinese believe that by comparison, Americans care about values, Hong Kong Chinese don’t!
Measures

Promotion focus

- When it comes to achieving things that are important to me, I find that I don’t perform as well as I ideally would like to.
- Do you often do well at different things that you try?
- I have found very few hobbies or activities in my life that capture my interest or motivate me to put effort into them.
- Compared to most people, are you typically unable to get what you want out of life?
- I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life.
Measures

Prevention focus

- Growing up, did you ever act in ways that your parents thought were objectionable?
- Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times.
- How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?
- Growing up, would you ever “cross the line” by doing things that your parents would not tolerate?
- Did you get on your parents’ nerves often when you were growing up?
Results

Promotion focus - Prevention focus

HK: Self-Rating  
US Self-Rating  
HK estimated HK  
HK estimated US  
US estimated HK  
US estimated US
Americans scored higher on promotion focus and lower on prevention focus than HK Chinese.

Hong Kong Chinese believed that Americans scored higher on promotion focus than did Hong Kong Chinese.

Americans believed that Americans scored lower on prevention focus than did Hong Kong Chinese.
Results

- Self-Deceptive Enhancement
- Impression Management
Americans scored higher on self-deceptive enhancement and lower on impression management than HK Chinese.

Hong Kong Chinese believed that Americans scored higher on deceptive self-enhancement than did Hong Kong Chinese.

Americans believed that Americans scored lower on impression management than did Hong Kong Chinese.
What did Americans believe

They believed that Americans are different from Hong Kong Chinese in the following aspects:

- Higher individualism
- Lower collectivism
- Lower prevention focus
- Lower impression management motivation
A second look at American participants’ responses

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<tr>
<td>Values perceived to be distinctly American</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-27*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values perceived to be distinctively HK</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
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*Correlation significant at .05. Endorsement of values that were more popular among Americans (HK Chinese) did not correlate with any of these measures.
Summary

Among Americans, those who endorse values that are *generally perceived* to be *distinctively American* attribute to themselves the regulatory focus and SDR style that are *generally perceived* to be *distinctively American*.

At least for some people, SDR, like regulatory focus, may not be simply a response bias; it is an integral part of their cultural self.
Aside from lay theories of the people and the world, perceivers also possess lay theories of culture (what people in the culture are like).

- Widely shared lay theories are important parts of a culture’s intersubjective reality.
- There are several ways lay theories may mediate cross-cultural differences in response to survey items.
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