Way to Capture Theory of Indigenous Psychology

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Taking Harbermas (1968) trichotomization of Knowledge in social science as a framework, this article analyzed the difficulties encountered by non-Western psychologists in their endeavor to develop indigenous psychologies on the basis of naïve-Positivism. In order to overcome these difficulties, I argued that non-Western indigenous psychologists have to construct culturally adequate theories on the basis of neo-Positivism so as to develop empirical-analytical, historical-hermeneutical and critical science for indigenous society.

Introduction

On October 23, 2009, Dr. Pe-Pua of University of New South Wales visited department of psychology, National Taiwan University and delivered a lecture on *capturing the theoretical contributions of indigenous psychology* which was eventually changed to *musings (reflections) of someone in search of theory*. The, content of her lecture reflected the common problematic situation encountered by non-Western psychologists in their efforts to develop indigenous psychology.

Dr. Pe-Pua was a student of Prof. Enriquez who was the founder of Filipino indigenous psychology. He established the Philippine psychology research house in 1971, the National Association of Filipino psychology in 1975, and began to teach the course of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* since 1978 with the aim of liberating Filipino psychology from the state of being colonized (Enriquez, 1992). He wished to develop Filipino indigenous psychology so as to attain the goal of cultural empowerment for the Philippine people (Enriquez, 1994).

Enriquez passed away in 1994. A new generation of leaders has emerged from the National Association of Filipino Psychology, which has taught members of the association to apply indigenous psychology, particularly in the field of counseling psychology. An attempt has also been made to develop indigenous research methods for conducting empirical research. These leaders have found that it is relatively difficult to publish their research findings in international journals and to attract the attention of the international community of psychologists. Pe-pua believed that there is a urgent need to develop robust theories via their research works, in order to enhance the theoretical contributions of their indigenous psychology.

The same problem has been encountered by psychologists who attempt to develop indigenous psychology in other non-Western countries. In fact, every cultural tradition in this world has its own core values. Each generation of the cultural group may utilize folk wisdoms for action based on those core values to help them in dealing with various kinds of problematic situations encountered in daily life. The main goal of developing indigenous psychology is to construct various systems of knowledge based on folk wisdom, in order to help people in solving their daily problems more efficiently.

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Three Types of Science in Indigenous Psychology

In light of Harbermas (1968) trichotomization of knowledge and his main arguments in *knowledge and human interests,* the goal of indigenous psychology should be the construction of three types of science in order to satisfy three kinds of human interests:

- *Empirical-analytical science:* As mentioned earlier, all major civilizations in this world have their core values, such as universal love in Christianity, *benovelence (jen)* in Confucianism, *Karma* in Hinduism, and *Shahidah* in Islam. When people act in accordance with a particular aspect of folk wisdom based on certain core values, their behaviors tends to show regularity and consistency which can be examined with various methods of social science which aim at developing empirical-analytical science. This approach is most popular in the scientific community of mainstream psychology.

- *Historical-Hermeneutic Science:* Because the major subjects for research in indigenous psychology are people who act in accordance with the core values and folk wisdom widespread in a particular culture, knowledge of empirical science developed on such a basis may help people to understand other's intention so as to facilitate communication in that culture. In this sense, empirical science may also be used as a foundation for developing historical-hermeneutic science which is aimed at attaining the cognitive goal of understanding and to satisfy the practical interests of human beings.

- *Critical Science:* The ideology of any cultural tradition may contain some elements which are a source for creating systematically distorted communication and hierarchical demonization within a given society. The rapid modernization of non-Western society by implanting Western ways of production and its accompanying ideology of capitalism may liberate people from the domination of traditional culture. However, people of indigenous society may be subject to the double domination of traditional culture as well as Western capitalism, so long as they are blind to these two types of ideology.

If we follow the research orientation of empirical-analytical science and devote our self to the construction of theories for indigenous psychology, the theories thus constructed may not only satisfy cognitive interests of human beings, but also help us to develop a historical-hermeneutic science for satisfying our practical interests. Furthermore, they may be used as basis for developing critical science to satisfy our interests of emancipation form various types of social domination.

The Philosophical Switch from Positivism to neo-positivism

Nevertheless, are contemporary indigenous psychologies of the world developing in this direction? At the very beginning of this century, I published a book entitled as *logic of social science* (Hwang, 2001), which reviewed five major philosophies of science which have been developed for social scientists to construct science during the 20th century, including positivism, neo-positivism, structuralism, hermeneutic and critical theory. In this book, I compared the ontological, epistemological and methodological switch from positivism to neo-positivism by taking *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 1922, 1961) and Evolutionary Epistemology (Popper, 1963, 1972) as two representative examples (Table 1): The positivists advocated *naïve realism* for its ontology and argued that the only reality is that which can be experienced by one's sensory organs. It is unnecessary for scientists to seek for the ultimate cause beyond the sensory experience of human beings. Such a position of radical empiricism urged them to advocate for an epistemology of truth which views scientific theory as representation of *truth*; as well as a methodology of *verification* which stresses that "the meaning of a proposition is the method for its verification" (Schlick, 1936).

In contrast to this, the neo-positivists adopted the ontology of *realism* which assumes that there exists an ontological reality beyond our sensory experiences. A scientist has to construct theory for describing the objective world by conjecturing about the nature of the subject of his study. Because theory is nothing more than the conjecture made by a scientist, the epistemology of non-positivism

Table 1 Comparison of ontology, epistemology and methodology between positivism and neo-positivism

Features	Positivism	Neo- positivism
Ontology	Naive realism (Radical empiricism)	Scientific realism
Epistemology	Theory represents truth	Approximation of truth
Methodology	Verification	Falsification

views scientific theory as an *approximation to the truth,* but not truth in itself". In the same vein, it advocates the methodology of *falsification* which attempts to falsify the major propositions of a theory by all means of dialectical reasoning as well as empirical evidence, in order to eliminate errors that might be contained in the theory.

Implantation of Western Academic Paradigm

Most psychologists of non-Western countries generally have adopted a position of naïve positivism and assumed that Western theories of psychology represent *truth* and they implanted the Western paradigms to non-Western societies for conducting empirical research or solving practical problems. They certainly will find problems in this approach after a period of practice. For example, the eminent Prof. Yung-ho Ko delivered a keynote speech at the 48th Annual Conference of Taiwanese Psychological Association held on September 26, 2009, after 9-year of his retirement, based on a careful review of the current status of clinical psychology in Taiwan, he said:

"Since the very beginning of the history of clinical psychology in Taiwan, its definition, its titles, its textbooks, readings, theories, instruments, methods, or even sites of work for clinical psychologists, have all been implanted from America. Half a century has passed, but the situation remains the same."

So he expected some senior professors of clinical psychology to devote themselves to the development of systematic theories after they have been promoted to the position of professor. Otherwise, "we may expect that clinical psychologists in Taiwan will still be indulged in following foreign theories blindly just like a walking corpse without its own soul."

The problem raised by Prof. Ko is not specific to the field of clinical psychology, but common to all fields of psychology in Taiwan. Viewing from the perspective of neo-positivism, if an imported theory of Western psychology cannot be used to interpret the psychological phenomena in a non-Western society, it is urgently necessary for non-Western psychologists to develop more adequate indigenous theories, interpret them and to solve problems of their society. Unfortunately, though Prof. Ko recognized the problematic situation clearly, he devoted himself to neither the indigenization movement nor the development of any indigenous theory, but the elaboration of habit theories which had been very popular in Western psychology of 1950s (Ko, 1994, 1997).

Academic Anti-Colonization

In contrast to Prof. Ko's approach, most indigenous psychologists tend to take a position of academic anti-colonialism when faced with the same problematic situation (e.g. Enriquez, 1992). They have argued that current mainstream psychology is basically a kind of Westernized or Americanized psychology and its theory and research methods contain a Western ethnocentric bias (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dason, 1992). When the Western psychology research paradigm is transplanted blindly to non-Western countries, it is usually irrelevant, inappropriate, or incompatible for understanding the mentalities of non-Western people (Sinha, 1984, 1986, 2002). Such a practice has been regarded as a kind of academic imperialism or colonialism (Ho, 1993). 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 have advocated "a bottom-up model building paradigm" (Kim, Park & Park, 2000, pp 265) to 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, pp 94), and that treats people "as interactive and proactive agents of their own actions" that occur in a meaningful context (Kim, Park & Park, 2000, pp 71). They perform a "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, pp 2) in order to develop a "cultural-appropriate psychology" (Azuma, 1984, pp 53), "a psychology based on and responsive to indigenous culture and indigenous realities" (Enriquez, 1993, pp 158) or a psychology whose "concepts, problems, hypothesis, methods, and tests emanate from, adequately represent, and reflect upon the cultural context in which the behavior is observed" (Adair, Puhan & Vohra, 1993, pp 149).

Challenges to Indigenous Psychology

The indigenous psychology approach described above has been criticized by mainstream psychologists. For example, Triandis (2000) points 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) indicates that the usage of the plural "indigenous psychologies" by many indigenous psychologists suggest an implicit restriction on the potential for development of indigenous psychology. The development of multiple psychologies not only contradicts the scientific requirement of parsimony, but also makes the demarcation of cultural populations a pending 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?

Viewing from Harbermas (1968) epistemology for the trichotomization of social science, the reason for mainstream psychologists to propose such challenges is because the so-called bottom-up approach adopted by most indigenous psychologists had been constituted on the philosophy of naïve positivism. They split the research field of indigenous psychology into several independent domains and collected huge amount of empirical data which might be useful for understanding some particular psychological phenomena in a given culture. But, it is very difficult to generalize those findings to other cultures, and it is also not easy for people from other cultures to understand them.

Reply of Indigenous Psychologist

Nevertheless, for indigenous psychologists in non-Western societies, the criticisms from mainstream psychologists represent an outsiders' viewpoint, because they don't understand the language and culture of indigenous society and are culturally blind to non-Western culture. They may accept the indigenous approach if they have a sympathetic understanding about a particular non-Western culture. Furthermore, in case a researcher has a profound understanding of the core values in a given culture, he may go beyond the level of data collection and attempt to develop substantial theory to integrate findings of empirical research in a specific domain. Taking the case of India as an example, some indigenous psychologists have adopted this approach to study self-efficacy (Bhawuk, 2005), creativity (Bhawuk, 2003), desire (Bhawuk, 2008), and leadership (Sinha, 1980) in India.

Because this approach may be linked with wisdom for action via language in a given culture, its findings might be useful for understanding social actions, facilitating interpersonal communication, and helping people to solve daily problems in that society. However, if psychologists in a particular culture don't know how to capture indigenous

theory from core values of their cultural tradition, findings of their research might become too fragmentary to be accepted by mainstream psychologists.

In reluctance with the fragmentation of empirical data collected by the quantitative approach of naïve positivism, some psychologists advocated the use of qualitative interview to collect the participants discourse on one's own life experience. The freshness of this phenomenological approach may attract readers' attention at the very beginning. However, the qualitative approach also emphasizes the importance of a researcher's sensitivity for theory construction (Glaser, 1978). Compiling qualitative data without any attempt to construct theory is just another approach of naïve positivism which is doomed to be unfruitful for scientific progress.

An Alternative Way to Capture Theory

In view of all those problems, I do believe that the epistemological goal of indigenous psychology is the construction of formal theory on the basic of neo-positivism with due consideration given to folk wisdom for action derived from core values of that specific culture, so that the theory may reflect the universal human mind as well as the particular mentality in that culture. In my recent book entitled confucian relationalism: Philosophical reflection, theoretical construction and empirical research (Hwang, 2009), which begun with a critical review on the approach of individualism-collectivism, argued that the idea of collectivism represents Western bias towards non-Western cultures, and constructed a series of theoretical models on the presumption of relationalism to explain moral reasoning, social exchange, achievement motivation, concept of face, organizational behaviors and conflict resolution in Confucian society. These theoretical models can be either examined by the methods of empirical research, or can be used to help people understand communicative action in indigenous society; they can also be utilized as a foundation for social criticism to liberate people from the indigenous domination of traditional culture on one hand and that of modern capitalism on the other. I do hope that this alternative approach may establish a new research tradition for indigenous psychology.

Conclusion

In consideration of the difficulties encountered by psychologists in developing indigenous psychologies of non-Western countries, I do believe that it is necessary for indigenous psychologists of non-Western society to adjust

their mentalities from anti-colonialism to post-colonialism (Hwang, 2005). They have to understand the major paradigms of Western philosophy of science, do their best to construct theories which can used to understand social actions in their indigenous society, and try to interpret functions of their theories in the context of their indigenous society. Such theories may help them to develop not only empirical-analytical science, but also historical-hermeneutical as well as critical science in indigenous society, so as to satisfy cognitive, practical and emancipative interests of human beings.

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